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ARIADNE  
OF  
ALLAN WATER

SIDNEY  
McCALL

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**ARIADNE OF ALLAN WATER**





THE  
GOSPEL  
OF  
MATTHEW



"Come, my poor darling. Come, my little bruised white rose," he whispered. **FRONTISPIECE.** See Page 239.

# ARIADNE OF ALLAN WATER

BY

SIDNEY MC CALL

AUTHOR OF "TRUTH DEXTER," "THE DEATH OF THE COUSIN," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPICE BY

C. H. TAPPES

BOSTON

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# ARIADNE OF ALLAN WATER





# ARIADNE OF ALLAN WATER

## BOOK ONE

### CHAPTER I

THE pale glory of an early spring sun shone full on the white pillars of the old Virginia home, casting a long rectangle of shadow over kitchen, barn, smoke-house, chicken-house, and various other outer buildings that stood at the rear.

Beyond this cluster of humble roofs began the old apple orchard, now in an ecstasy of bloom. The roseate billows flowed into a gentle "dip," flooding the valley evenly, and scrambling, in some disorder, the slope of the further hillside. Near the top they paused abruptly at sight of a menacing line of ragged, gray bowlders, among which only a few young cedars had footing, and these seemed to scowl darkly as if defying anything so frivolous as a pink apple tree to gain their sky-poised eminence.

On the flat altar of the nearest rock stood the blue-clad figure of a girl, Ariadne, a slim young goddess of the spring, giving and receiving homage.

As she looked now upon the massed flowers at her feet, the child in her, nourished by fantastic stories of mythology, fairy lore, and old-world romances, began to weave conscious similes. The trees, with their leaning trunks and outspread branches, were court ladies in lace and fluttering pink ribbons, assembled in an audience

chamber before a throne; and she, Ariadne, the young queen. She smiled and stretched out arms of welcome. Almost she could see the whispering beauties turn powdered heads, nodding to each other in pleasure at her graciousness.

Then she likened them to a mass of giant posies, fashioned and afterward spilled by some careless servitor on his too hurried way toward gilded cloud-castles beyond the hill. The birds darting among them were butterflies. In the old days there were surely giants. Even the Bible spoke of them. Was it not possible that even now, somewhere, there lived a stalwart young giant, beautiful as a tall tree, who could have stooped over, snapped off a whole apple-bough as easily as she, Ariadne, could pick a dandelion, and thrust it nonchalantly into his green buttonhole?

She laughed and let her fancies vanish. After all it was sweeter to know them for just what they were, her own dear trees, each one an individual as familiar and distinct as the human folk who peopled her narrow world. Now her arms fell. She was no longer a priestess or a young sovereign. It was the smile of a girl who loved them for themselves, that now deepened in the sunshine. Finally, as if satiated with loveliness, Ariadne lifted her eyes and gazed out across the orchard, the big white house, and the wide grounds, straight to the east, to taller hills crowned with a haze of dark cedars.

She had never been beyond those distant hills, nor, indeed, had she ever longed to pass them. Here at her feet was her heritage, kingdom, where she was the petted queen. No other spot could be so beautiful. Even the sun was but a part of it, and the blue span of sky above as much her own as the green lawn about the Big House.

She drew herself more erect, taking in deep breaths of morning air. She felt transparent, tinged throughout with the gold of it. Life was so wonderful, so exciting, that she wanted to laugh aloud, to cry, to fall upon her knees, thanking the great Maker of it all. But, of course, one fell to one's knees in church only, or by one's bed, at night. She told herself to remember, when bedtime came, to add a little postscript to her usual prayer, thanking God for making the world so exquisite. She hoped He wouldn't consider it familiar or a little disrespectful. She must ask Grandma about it first.

Now she noticed, down among the apple trees, a small brown figure, running. It was Mammy's little grandson, Anguish. Evidently he had been sent to fetch her. She watched him threading his way like an eccentric shuttle. Anguish never moved in a straight line. In spite of his characteristic diagonals of motion, there was something unnatural about him — something too businesslike and silent. Yes, that was it. The silence! She could not recall ever having seen him in the open air when he was not either whistling or singing. Unconsciously she frowned, and the smile fled from her lips.

"I wonder why he isn't singing?" the girl mused. "Mammy hasn't walloped him this early in the day. She's too busy getting breakfast."

Anguish was a sort of imp of laughter, a brown fiber of restless merriment. His whistling embraced all the notes of all known birds, not disdaining ludicrous imitations of barnyard fowls. He could make a brood of "biddies" leave the parent hen; but his proudest boast was that he could "fool er squinch-owl off'n its nest" and lure it to destruction. With his possession of such attributes, the perversion of his name by the other negroes from "Angus" to the more euphonious but

absurdly unsuitable "Anguish" became a lasting joy to the entire neighborhood.

Anguish, long since, had caught sight of his young mistress. Few things, indeed, escaped his beadlike eyes. He ascended the farther slope at a run, his tongue hanging out for breath, and the white rims around his beads rolling ominously. He had been strictly schooled in the etiquette never to "holler" at white folks; so now it was not until he stood directly beneath the blue figure, and had executed a queer little genuflection, that he panted out:

"Ole Miss wants you, Miss Airey. She sez come to breakfus right away. She's — she's — got a letter fum yo' Paw."

"Oh!" said the girl, scrambling down. "I didn't know it was so late. Has Grandma been waiting long for me, Anguish?"

"Nome. She ain't set down yit," answered the boy, not looking at her. "She wuz a-readin' de letter. She — she —"

"She what?" cried Ariadne impatiently. Yes, there was surely something wrong with Anguish.

"Ole Miss bin — cryin'!" the boy burst out, and then stood still, as if overpowered by his own words.

Ariadne, too, paused. She could scarcely believe it. A second look at the small, upturned, frightened face convinced her. She, too, was beginning to feel frightened. Grandma crying! Somehow she had not thought that grown people knew how to cry. And as for grandma — why, that gentle face smiled even in its sleep.

"It is bad news about father," her heart whispered. "It can't be anything else."

Now she began running. The boy kept swift silent pace at her heels. She asked him no more questions.

She was trying not to think, not to imagine things, until she could reach home and learn the truth.

Under the apple trees the shadows were damp and chill. She sped through them like a startled deer. The outer buildings, too, were still in shadow. Old Uncle Peter was smoking his corn-cob pipe on the kitchen porch. She hurried past him into the house and flung open the door of the breakfast room.

This, built as an annex to the main building and consisting of but a single story, had been set at an angle where the earliest sun-rays could find it, and was the chosen spot of the household. First used for breakfast only, a tentative luncheon had been served there because "it was so cozy" — and after that dinner, and gradually it had become the general dining-room, while the stately apartment originally intended for the purpose was preserved for months at a time in shrouded grandeur. Here the window-boxes flowered best, and the wood-fire crackled most cheerily. Old Mrs. Bannister's mahogany sewing-table with glass knobs stood in the sunniest corner, and over it hung a little rack containing the favorite books of Ariadne's childhood.

As she now entered, breathless, she saw that her grandmother stood before the mantel shelf. One hand was upraised, moving among white roses, a bowl of which was placed directly beneath a lifelike portrait of her only child, Ariadne's dead young mother. The other, which held a crumpled letter, was pressed down rigidly at her side, half disappearing in the folds of her full black skirt. Even at a distance the girl could see how this hand with the letter trembled.

Ariadne did not wait, but cried aloud, in coming: "Anguish said you had a letter. Oh, Grandma — is father sick?"

"No, dear — nothing of that sort. He is quite well," the old lady answered, trying to smile at her.

The girl drew in a long shuddering breath of relief. What else could matter if her father were well?

"I was afraid — Anguish was so queer and said you wanted me at once," Ariadne explained, as if excusing her indecorous excitement. "But it is all right now."

She went up to the old lady, putting slim young arms around her, and kissing the soft cheek that always seemed like a withered white rose. Then she turned to the breakfast table, where the coffee was sending up fragrant and inviting steam. Mrs. Bannister's glance followed. She moved a little mechanically toward her place at the head of the table, and as Ariadne held the chair for her, laid the crumpled letter down. But when she attempted to serve the coffee, her hands shook, and after an effort to lift it, she replaced the heavy silver coffee-pot and said:

"Ariadne, I must ask you to pour it. I find I am still too much unstrung."

The girl moved to obey. In this stronger light she saw the old grandmother's face clearly. The mark of recent tears was unmistakable. The chin quivered and would not be quieted, though it was evident that the old lady was striving with all her power for self-control. Fear came again to the granddaughter. She sank back, forgetting the coffee.

"It is something bad, after all," she faltered. "Please tell me everything, Grandma."

"Yes, in a moment," said the elder lady, pressing a delicate handkerchief against her lips.

Ariadne held out her hand. "Shan't I read the letter for myself? You always let me read father's letters."

"No — no —" said Mrs. Bannister, covering the pages

with shaking fingers. "This time it is better for me to tell you what he says. He asks me to break it to you as I think best."

"To break it to me," repeated Ariadne, frowning. She rested her arms upon the table and looked with wondering, troubled eyes into her grandmother's face.

The old lady drew herself together with a great effort. She sat upright, bracing her slender, silk-clad shoulders against the old Gothic chair. "There is no easy way of saying it," she stated. "Your father is to be married again."

"Married. Father married?" repeated the girl. The echoed words held, at first, no meaning.

Mrs. Bannister sank down a few inches and put the handkerchief to her eyes. Ariadne stared on, unseeing, at the spot where her grandmother's eyes had been. That one word "married" reverberated in her mind as through an empty room. There was nothing to connect it with her father. What, after all, did it mean to be married? She had read but few novels, and those were of Mrs. Bannister's choosing. In her fairy tales the Prince and Princess always married as a matter of course and lived happily ever after. That was the end of the story. People on earth did it, too, she supposed — young, happy people, of a sort that never came to Allan Water. Perhaps that was what had happened to her own parents, years and years before. Grandma was never tired of talking about the beautiful girl whose portrait made of this little room a shrine — of the way that all who came near loved her — of the young husband's adoration and his tender and inconsolable grief when she had been taken from him. Yet, until this moment she had never thought of that exquisite vision she called "mother" as ever having been married.



Now slowly Ariadne lifted her eyes and fixed them upon the radiant, pictured face above. In it she saw goodness, youth, and an immortal happiness. "So she and father were married," thought the child. "Why couldn't they have lived happily ever after? Why did God take her away?"

The last words were whispered, but the grandmother heard them. Their significance — or rather what she took to be their full significance — combined with the girl's upraised, adoring look, broke down her last stronghold of reserve. Bending over, the old lady sobbed aloud.

Ariadne sprang up and put her arms about the shaking figure. "Why do you cry like this, Grandma? It is terrible to see you cry. Does it mean something dreadful for father to be married? Will it make him different?"

"No — no. It isn't that, dear child," the old lady said, trying to speak calmly. "It is the thought of his bringing another woman here — to this house — to take your mother's place."

"But how can anybody else take her place?" the girl questioned, with another glance up to the portrait. "She — she — is everywhere!"

"That is a very beautiful way of looking at it," replied the old lady. "It comforts me. There, dear, don't look so troubled. I shall control myself. Already I am more composed. Ah, I hear Mandy coming in with the rest of the breakfast. You must be hungry after your morning's walk."

"I am. I'm 'most starved," said Ariadne childishly.

Mandy, a pretty, young mulatto girl, entered with a large tray. Just behind her, like a shrunk shadow, crept Anguish. He was peering in to see if "Ole Miss" was still crying. Ariadne was conscious of a sudden

antipathy to the little creature, a feeling made poignant by the fact that she, too, had known the sensation of curiosity, almost of repulsion, at the sight of the old lady's tears. She frowned, giving a quick, indignant gesture to motion this "peeping Tom" away, then glanced around to her grandmother to see if the action had been observed.

To her relief the elder lady had seen nothing. She sat a little stiffly upright in her accustomed manner, her old face tranquil, and her hands moving with their usual precision among the coffee things. As Mandy deposited the last warm dish upon its mat, her mistress said evenly: "I think that Susan will have to warm the coffee. Miss Airey and I have let it grow quite cold."

The tension was over. Ariadne began with a relish upon her hominy, scrambled eggs, and bacon. She did not notice that Mrs. Bannister made a mere pretense of eating. When the hot coffee had been served, and Mandy been sent to the kitchen for the first batter-cakes, the old lady remarked, quite casually:

"I must tell you something more of the lady your father is to marry."

"Oh, please," said the girl eagerly.

Mrs. Bannister, without a tremor, unfolded the sinister epistle, adjusted her gold-rimmed spectacles, and glanced from the top to the bottom of the first page with an air of expurgation. "She is quite young, Ransome says."

Ariadne beamed.

"Still in her early thirties."

The young face fell as suddenly. Thirties! Why, anywhere in the thirties was advanced middle age. "I do hope she is pretty," said the girl in a slightly dejected tone.

"Um — um —" murmured the reader, now turning to the second page. "He doesn't say it in so many words. But you may be sure that at this stage he would think her good-looking whether she is or not."

Again Ariadne felt rebuffed. She had never heard her grandmother speak in such a deprecating tone. She cast about desperately for some new hope on which to pin her faith.

"If father likes her well enough to — to — bring her here," she cried, not being able yet to mention the difficult word "marry," "I am sure she's pretty and sweet and good! Don't you think so too, Grandma? How long before she is coming?"

"The marriage is to take place almost immediately," transcribed the old lady in a colorless voice. "It seems that she has few friends and no near relatives. She visits about but spends most of her time in Charleston."

She lowered the pages and looked over them and her glasses at Ariadne. "At least we can be thankful that she is a Southern lady."

The reading was resumed. "Her name is Miss Donna Mayrant." Again a pause, followed by the comment: "Her mother must have been a silly, sentimental creature. Perhaps she traveled in Italy. That's an Eye-Italian name."

"Is it?" murmured Ariadne.

"They are to be married quietly at the home of a Dr. Ravenal, who is her cousin twice removed. Then they go to New York. Nellie Henry will know all about them. She has visited in Charleston."

As she mentioned the name "Nellie Henry," Mrs. Bannister gave a sharp exclamation. "Why, Nellie is coming to spend the day with us — this very day. It

had slipped entirely from my mind. I am to send Peter to the station for her."

She began to move her chair back, at which Ariadne, getting to her feet, ran to assist. The service was performed somewhat mechanically, for the young girl's thoughts were in a whirl.

So many new ideas had come crowding in at once. The grandmother's phrase: "We can be thankful she is a Southern lady," was the most mystifying of all. Could it be possible that there were any ladies not "Southern"? Her world was peopled entirely with Virginians, or those in some way connected with Virginia families. These were what the darkies called "quality" and old ladies like Mrs. Bannister termed, complacently, "gentle-folk." Aside from this class there were, of course, the remote and admirable English from whom all Virginia ancestry worthy of the name had been derived. Somewhere on the American continent was a race called Yankees; but these were to be thought of as little as possible. For the rest of the inhabited earth there were merely "foreigners" — aggregations of human beings in various tones of white, yellow, red, and brown, who foregathered in places so utterly unknown that they might as well have been assorted on so many different planets. Who but a Southern lady could be an inmate of Allan Water!

There was no time to lay this problem before a more experienced mind, for Mrs. Bannister had already summoned Mandy and was giving orders to have the phaëton in readiness at once.

As the young negress went out, Mrs. Bannister folded her hands and let them fall with a sigh of satisfaction. "How dreadful if I had forgotten the dear girl altogether!" she said. "Her note came with your father's

letter, and it is not to be wondered at if I overlooked it just at first. She is taking the nine o'clock train from Culpeper. I am sure that Peter will get to the station in time."

"Oh, Grandma, can't I drive to the station for Cousin Nellie?" pleaded the girl.

As the elder lady hesitated, she cried: "Did Cousin Nellie say she was bringing little Dick Carter?"

"She doesn't mention him, but she will, of course. She never stirs without him. I do trust that the little negress is along to keep up with the child. We are unused to babies over here."

"I hope she does bring him," said Ariadne, her face sparkling. "He is *such* a precious! I wish he lived here all the time."

From Mrs. Bannister's perturbed expression it could be clearly seen that she did not share the girl's desire. Her gentle old eyes were moving slowly around the immaculate room.

"Yes," she murmured, as if to herself, "he is walking now. I must have my sewing-tables turned around with the knobs to the wall, and loop up the tendrils of wandering-jew in all the window-boxes."

"But may I drive, Grandma? Now say yes, please. You know those fat horses couldn't run away if they tried."

"I suppose so," agreed the old lady, with a suppressed sigh. Hers was a nature so timid of accidents that no horse save a dead one could be trusted not to bolt. "But stop a moment. The phaëton is not around to the front yet. Old Peter gets slower every day. There's a special message in your father's letter which you have not been told. Perhaps you would like to read it for yourself."

Ariadne took the letter eagerly. The sight of her

father's bold clear writing gave a feeling of strength. It was almost like a touch of his dear hand.

"There, not so high up. Begin with the words: 'And say to my dear daughter—'" directed the old lady, pointing.

Ariadne hastily lowered her eyes to the line.

"And say to my dear daughter that she is still to be my little friend and comrade. Nothing is to be taken from her. On the contrary, I believe that much is to be added to her young life. It must have been at times very dull for the child in the big house where all of us were so much her seniors. Donna is near enough my daughter's age to become a real companion. She expresses herself as most anxious to win Ariadne's love. This she cannot fail to do, for she is gentle, clinging, and affectionate. Her life has been rather a lonely and unhappy one. Her devotion to me is touching, and I consider it a great privilege to be able to make up to her, in some measure, for the unhappiness in her early life. With regard to yourself, my dear mother, I most sincerely hope that you will consider carefully what I have urged in the earlier pages of this long letter, and will continue to make your home with us. This is Donna's desire as much as it is my own. We all need you.

"With deep regret for the distress which this news of mine must inevitably bring, and renewed assurances of my unaltered love, respect, and gratitude, I am, as ever, your son

"RANSOME SKIPWITH."

Ariadne looked up with shining eyes. "Oh, isn't that beautiful?" she said with fervor. "It makes everything seem right. She wants us all to love her. I believe I do, already. I knew she must be kind and sweet."

Mrs. Bannister now stood erect. She watched the changing face before her with a sort of tremulous intensity. At the eager words, she tried to smile, an effort that in some way appeared unspeakably pathetic.

"It's funny about father's asking you not to leave Allan Water, though," mused the girl, her brightness fading just a little. "Of course you wouldn't! Why, I couldn't live if you were away from me, Grandma. I don't believe we have been apart a whole day in all my life."

Now the answering smile was real, but despite tender lips, a deeper sadness found harbor in the yearning old eyes.

"That will all be decided in good time, my darling. There are things you cannot understand just yet. Now send the little frown away" — she leaned over to kiss it — "and run up-stairs for your sunbonnet. You will need it. The glare is strong already. The horses are at the door. I hear old Peter sneezing. He always sneezes when I make him hitch them up early in the day. He doesn't like it."

Ariadne, laughing once more, ran out into the hallway and up the wide, curving stairs. Her feet sounded a flying rhythm of youth and expectancy. She hummed little snatches of her favorite ballad, "Allan Water."

Old Mrs. Bannister remained motionless, listening. Her brave smile slowly quivered into lines of desolating grief. For an instant she put both hands to her eyes as if to shut out the future. Then, turning slowly, she went up again to her daughter's picture, peering upward dimly. She held up her arms as Ariadne, an hour before, had strained her own outward to the beauty of the world. She did not strive for speech. Even in the bruised old heart there was no articulate petition. This thing had

fallen upon her all too suddenly. The two faced each other silently — immortal spring and a frail, withering rose of a generation soon to pass. From both their veins had come this new, clean, dew-sweet blossom, the young girl, Ariadne. What would life bring to her?

Again the twinkling feet, the lilt upon the stair, and a blue bonnet thrust, for a fluttering instant, through the doorway!

“I’m starting, Grandma. Come out and wave good-bye!”



## CHAPTER II

ARIADNE sat, poised like a bird about to fly, on the faded tan cushions on the front seat. The over-fed horses, Pitt and Fox, their glossy, distended haunches swaying in unison, ambled submissively before her.

The old "double phaëton" which they drew, of a pattern practically obsolete in more progressive localities, was still considered, in Virginia, to be the one seemly vehicle which a gentlewoman should drive. There was really no necessity for the girl to hold the worn reins. The horses knew quite as well as she the road to the country station.

Above her young head, from which the sunbonnet had already slipped, rose, high in air, a thin, flat top spread evenly with black oilcloth, and surrounded by a greenish fringe. Perhaps the fringe had once been brown — perhaps yellow. No one seemed to remember. This cover, held aloft at the corners by very slender iron rods, gave the conveyance a humorous resemblance to an attenuated four-poster bed.

Ariadne, serene in her conviction that all was as it should be, smiled under the tattered fringe and pictured the coming meeting with Cousin Nellie and the adorable, if naughty, Dick Carter.

As with all other material surroundings of her childhood, she accepted and admired the ancient carry-all unquestioningly. Mr. Skipwith had, for his own use, a high spring-buggy and its thoroughbred Kentucky mare. Her drives in this winged chariot, taken gener-

ally under protest from the apprehensive grandmother, were as different from the present decorous perambulation as is the flight of a swallow to the mincing progress of a tame pigeon.

Besides the phaëton and the buggy, there was an old, two-wheeled farm-cart that tradition said had once been blue. This was in the special charge of Uncle Peter, as was also the gray mule, Jericho, which dragged it rumblingly along the edges of the pasture or down to the railway freight-shed to haul back sundry boxes.

These made up the stabling of Allan Water and were therefore things in which to take pride. The home-staying child had become, unconsciously to herself and the elders who loved her, keenly possessive. The humblest accessory of this, her allotted world, had the glamor of intimate association. Things in themselves transient, viewed in the retrospect of her brief but vivid young existence, were literally "apparelled in celestial light." She was given few chances for comparison. On the rare occasions when Grandma had taken her to spend the day with Cousin Nellie in Culpeper, she had been too shy to make friends with other little girls, brought in, arbitrarily, from neighboring houses, and preferred to remain quietly within sight and hearing of the safe, familiar figure of her grandmother, finding sufficient amusement in looking out from various windows.

The little city seemed a crowded, gray, forbidding place. She pitied the people who possessed those queer, tiny flower gardens, and such ugly, bare back-yards held in by high board fences. Even in Cousin Nellie's yard there was only a single tree, a disreputable, warty, old he-mulberry — the kind that Uncle Peter chopped

down scornfully, remarking that they were po' white trash trees. It had always worried the child that relatives of her own continued to permit the plebeian growth. Not for the world would she have admitted to Uncle Peter the fact of its existence.

Though she dearly loved Cousin Nellie and the tall, grave "Cousin Judge" who was always so kind, and though each of the excursions was begun with an almost suffocating sense of excitement, returning made the true glory of the day. The first sight of old Peter waiting at the station thrilled her with the promise of lost joys soon to be regained. And then the drive homeward through wild, sweet-smelling, growing things! No place was here for a dusty, vagrant, old he-mulberry. And then the first glimpse of the stately entrance — the long, curved driveway through the lawn — and at last — at last — the tall white pillars of her own dear home, with Anguish turning handsprings in an ecstasy of welcome!

The child's love for Allan Water was becoming a sort of passion. When Cousin Nellie came to them here, as she would to-day, and now especially that there was small Dick Carter, Ariadne felt that life had nothing better to give.

She had passed the four square brick and cement posts of the gateway, and soon, by a sharp turning of the road, came into a little wood set thick with junipers. The trees had been judiciously thinned from undergrowth, making each one a stately green pyramid. Many of the long lower branches skimmed the earth, and under one of these a darker shadow suddenly moved. It was Anguish, watching for a chance to indulge in a forbidden and most precious pastime, that of "catching on behind." She pretended not to see him, knowing that her spoken

permission, instead of gratifying, would take off the keenest edge of joy. When they got home she would have to intercede for him with Mammy, to divert the "walloping" he justly deserved; but just now she wanted everybody to be happy, even Anguish at the immoral price of a stolen ride.

The day was so unspeakably beautiful, the scent of the sun on the dark junipers so sweet, the whole of life, with its new vistas opening before her, so wonderful and strange!

The woods were very still. On the sandy road the thud of the horses' feet fell as upon grass. A sparkle of bird-notes, flashing from one tree-top to another, gleamed in the silence like motes in a sun-ray. She heard the rush of the little negro's body, lithe and direct as a lizard's predatory dart. She felt the slight impact, as his claw-like hands leaped up and clutched the back of the farthest seat. Her smile grew deeper. The unconscious horses trotted in unbroken unison. Little by little the tapping of small, horny, dangling feet, that touched the fleeing road at intervals fell into rhythm with the jogging steeds and the girl's low, crooning song. Even the breathing of the conscious earth became a part of it. Life sang in the girl's heart.

At the first covered bridge the spell was shattered. Ariadne's song stopped, and she leaned over to grasp the reins more firmly. The sound of hoofs, reëchoed from the boards beneath them and the flimsy, wooden arch above, reduplicated into the roar of a cavalcade; while at the back of the vehicle hung Anguish, no longer pliant, but gathered up into a knot of queer brown angles that his "foots" wouldn't git splinters drove into 'em.

The bare little station was now in sight. It stood like a Noah's Ark anchored in a red-clay sea. All about it

ran the deck of an uncovered platform, and near one corner was planted a group of hitching posts furnished with iron rings. Already there was tethered an archaic buggy with a concave horse to match, and under the nearest tree, a giant red-oak, stood several unharnessed wagons.

At first no human being was in sight. Then, at the sound of newly arriving wheels, a door at the farther end of the building opened, and the small figure of a man strolled out, shading his eyes for a recognizing squint and then moving forward more briskly.

This was the station-master, Jasper Crane, as much a part of the unpretentious edifice as the roof that covered it.

"Good mornin', Miss Airey," he called, stretching out one hand for the reins.

The practiced horses curved smoothly and came to a standstill within an inch of the platform's edge. Ariadne sprang out, delivering the reins, as it were, in flight. Anguish had already disappeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Crane," she answered brightly. "How long before the train gets in?"

"Oughter be here now, but o' course it ain't! Come to meet your Paw?"

"No, Cousin Nellie Henry from Culpeper. She is to spend the day. Dick Carter is coming, too."

Mr. Crane's somewhat serious countenance did not reflect her pleasure.

"You'll have to keep a sharp lookout or he'll be under them train wheels 'fore you know it. I never seen a kid of his age could git into so much mischief. Last time he sot in an open keg o' soft rosin."

"I remember," Ariadne laughed. "We had an awful time pulling him out. Cousin Nellie thought one of his legs might be left behind. But he is so cunning!"

"I don't know 'bout the cunnin'," said Mr. Crane gloomily. "He oughter travel in a dog-basket."

The girl's chin went up suddenly. She resented the suggestion that a kinsman of her own, however youthful and perhaps deserving, could be put in a dog-basket, and she walked swiftly away, until the platform at the further side, running parallel with the tracks, had been reached. Two long whistles sounded from Wolf Ridge to the right.

"She's comin' now," cried Mr. Crane. "I'll hang out the green flag just to make sure she'll stop. Them engineers like to play tricks on me." He hurried into the small waiting-room, leaving the door wide. A small stove, red hot with smoldering coke, stood in the center of the room. Compressed and over-heated air rushed out in a flood.

The station-master and his flag soon followed. He came up close to Ariadne, unfurling the scrap of green and gazing down anxiously upon it, as if he feared the color might have changed in the night.

"I don't believe you will need it," said Ariadne. "No train would keep on going if Cousin Nellie wanted it to stop."

"Reckon you're right there, little Miss," grinned Mr. Crane. "I'll jes' hang it out fer looks, though. Seems sort of welcoming."

As he stooped, the woods again fell silent. The train with all its herald warnings had apparently vanished from the earth.

Mr. Crane shifted, at the same instant one baggy trouser leg and a huge wad of chewing tobacco. "Where's your Paw now, Miss Airey?"

"In Charleston," she answered, just a little coldly. Of course she had known Mr. Crane from childhood.

As long as she could remember, he had petted her, saving up pop-corn balls and glass pistols of variegated and uneatable candy levied from train peddlers, to give her pleasure. He was almost as much a part of her life as the servants up at Allan Water, and yet he was not exactly the person with whom, now that she had grown so tall, she could discuss her family. Unhampered by these delicate distinctions, the little man went on in an easy, conversational tone.

"They tell me your Paw's gettin' real rich, Miss Airey. Them West Virginia lands that him and Jedge Henry took up has turned out reg'lar gold-mines fer coal. He's allays flyin' about now, gittin' big orders. Jedge Henry said as how they were tryin' fer a navy contract down to Charleston. Reckon he's at it now."

Ariadne turned her back upon him, walked to the very edge of the platform, and peered along the shining curve of rails.

"The train surely is late to-day," she remarked impersonally.

Mr. Crane pursued his thoughts aloud. "Some folks gits all the luck," he reflected plaintively. "Now your Paw and Jedge Henry and me wuz boys together — jes' plain, two-legged boys. We fished with the same sort o' grasshoppers an' stole apples from the selfsame tree. An' look at 'em now! Both prosperous men, gettin' richer every minute, wearin' fine clothes, travelin' in drawin'-rooms, an', fer all I know, orderin' champagne fer supper. Look at me! — stuck in this one-horse station like a wood-sawyer in pine-bark — watchin' the trains go by — an' punchin' tickets. That's all I do, punch tickets! An' I reckon I'll keep on punchin' until I punch myself into my grave."

Ariadne had slowly faced him. There was something

of reproof in the poise of her young body, something repressed and even a trifle hard in the flower-like face.

"How is your wife's neuralgia?" she inquired distantly. She might have been old Mrs. Bannister condescending to her overseer. Mr. Crane could no longer ignore the childish hauteur; but far from resenting, it delighted him. This slip of a girl was already showing herself to be "real quality." He chuckled a little to himself before answering.

"It's doing middlin' well jes' now, thank you, Miss Airey. As it happens, there ain't nothin' special she wants to drive me into doin'.

"All wimen's like that," he went on meditatively, as Ariadne vouchsafed no answering remark. "Some uses tears and hystericks; some takes to broomsticks and the biscuit-roller; my old lady works neuralgy to the bone. It's all fer the one purpose. They're jes' nach'ally set on gittin' their own way, an — they gits it." The last words came out with a heavy sigh.

Ariadne continued to remain aloof and unresponsive.

"It won't be long before you're startin' along that same old road fer yourself, Miss Airey," he now asserted. A twinkle which she disdained to notice made his small eyes dance. "But if you keep on gittin' purtier and purtier, like you're doin' now, you won't need any o' them rude weepsons. It'll be a case of Davy Crockett. Jes' pint your finger, and your coon will drap."

"There is the train at last!" cried the girl in great relief. Mr. Crane had never before been quite so personal, so inexcusably familiar. She resented it intensely. And yet those words "If you keep on getting purtier and purtier" had a strangely alluring sound. The phrase clung and would not be brushed away.

Could it be that she was growing to resemble the lovely



young mother? She thought of the picture with its dark, smiling eyes, its rose-tinted cheeks, its masses of brown, curling hair, and at the memory shook her own blond locks in protest. No, she was pale, and had queer, changing eyes, and hair of no particular color — just hair, as Mr. Crane had said of two-legged boys. There was not a ripple or a wave to it. She could never be pretty. It was only the station-master's way of teasing her.

The train was almost upon them. Ariadne's eager look swept down the row of shut glass windows. The engine, with its deafening bell, rushed past. After that came a baggage-car, then a negro coach, followed by a "smoker" in which a few languid male figures sprawled through a pent-up mist. After that was the ordinary, local day-coach. The brakes grated harshly; the train came to a throbbing halt.

In the fourth car a child was beating frantically upon a window-pane with some hard object. She could see him jerked violently away. Surely that was Cousin Nellie and little Dick! In another moment a negro porter sprang out, setting a dingy, carpet-covered stool among the tracks, and Cousin Nellie emerged, fair, fat, and smiling, a split basket on one arm and a huge bunch of flowers in the other.

Behind her came a thin-legged little negress of about twelve years of age, whose arms strained to hold a struggling boy. She wore no hat, and her head was covered closely by small, projecting knobs of black wool, each wound tightly with a bit of old shoe-string, a protection much needed at the moment, for Master Dick Carter was pounding it with the same dark clod that had nearly shattered the car window.

They had scarcely reached the ground when Mrs. Henry, turning to the porter, commanded:

"Take that terrapin out of Dick Kyarter's hand and put it in this basket. He'll kill the wretched animal! Never mind his yells, Loovenia, hold him tight and climb up on the platform. Hello, Airey! Thank you, porter. I'd give you a quarter if I could open my purse. Never mind, I'll leave it with Mr. Crane, and you can get it on your return trip. Loovenia, for goodness' sake, take him away quick! He bellows like a bull. Hush, Dick Kyarter, hush! No, you can't have the turtle again. You are a bad boy. Show him the train, Loovenia."

The jointed cars moved on, and in the puffing steam and shuddering axles, Dick's shrieks of wrath were first drowned and then soothed. With wide, brilliant eyes he watched the fleeting monster, and Loovenia's timid adjuration, "See de pritty chu-chu," was an encouragement not needed.

"Well, thank heaven that is over!" said Mrs. Henry fervently, as she adjusted her comfortable bulk to the front seat beside Ariadne and placed the basket between their feet. "I do hope that bottle of peach brandy won't leak all over us. There are some educators for the baby in there, and a lot of extra clothes. I'll declare, Ariadne, that child would have to be dressed from the skin out ten times a day to keep him clean. He's a perfect terror!" She turned round to gaze upon the "terror," who was now in Loovenia's lap, with the restored terrapin in his chubby fist, a picture of seraphic loveliness. "Mother's pet lamb," she murmured.

Ariadne turned, too. "Isn't he the dearest thing! Every time I see him, Cousin Nellie, he seems to get prettier and prettier."

At the repetition of these words her cheeks grew hot. Her eyes fell with sudden shyness, and her lips trembled at her own queer feelings.

Cousin Nellie was staring openly. She put one warm, ungloved hand beneath the girl's chin and forced the flushed face upward. The waves of color came faster. She could not meet the kind, inquisitive eyes.

"Look at me, Ariadne. What on earth — what have you been doing to yourself, anyway? You are a positive beauty, — yes, you are!"

She dropped her hand, leaned back, and laughed for sheer pleasure. "Somehow I never thought of your being pretty," the rich, comfortable voice went on. "Wouldn't Cousin Belinda be shocked if she knew I was telling you so? She belongs to that old-fashioned school that doesn't believe in a girl's knowing when she has good looks. But I do. If ever I have a daughter as pretty as that thing on the back seat, I shall make it my business to let her know it. Why shouldn't she? It is nothing that she's done, only a gift that she can thank her Maker for. It gives the right kind of a girl self-respect. It teaches her just how to hold her head and how to enter a room, which is something that few women learn until they are so old that nobody looks at them.

"You know what I believe?" She paused dramatically.

Ariadne was gazing back with all her eyes. She had said to herself that they were colorless, but just now tints and gleams of all the beautiful eyes in the world seemed concentrated in them. Mrs. Henry caught her breath a little.

"I believe you are going to be a ripping, raving, tearing young beauty! And I want you to remember that it was your Cousin Nellie who first told you so."

Ariadne sat perfectly still. She did not know that she held the reins or that the old phaëton was moving. Something warm and fragrant caressed her young limbs,

passing across her very heart. The color came and went in her throat, her temples, her cheeks, never resting in one spot but always shifting like the moving tones of an opal.

"She's like a cameo coming to life," thought the elder woman.

Now the girl tried to speak, but her voice was so low and shaken that Mrs. Henry had to lean down to catch it.

"Do — do you think I can ever look like my mother?" She was overwhelmed by her own temerity in daring to approach this ultimate standard of loveliness. The answer came like a shock of cold water.

"Goodness, no! You're not her type at all. She was a pretty little thing, of course, and we all adored her — a regular brown-eyed, dimpled, Virginia pet — but you are growing up into the real thing, a tall, willowy —"

She got no further. "But I don't want to be tall. I'm growing too fast now!"

Mrs. Henry leaned back again and laughed aloud. It was a good sound to hear. If one could imagine the laugh of a large, ripe peach, the result would be much like the contralto notes that abashed Ariadne.

"Now isn't that the funniest thing!" mused Cousin Nellie. "I've never yet known a girl who wanted to be tall. Now I never was what you would call a pretty girl —"

"Oh, Cousin Nellie, I'm sure —" Ariadne broke in with genuine distress.

"No, I wasn't! And it didn't bother me a bit. My one beauty was a good figure. You wouldn't think, to look at me now, that I was ever as slim as you are." She chuckled appreciatively. "I was, though, pretty nearly; and I naturally walked well. Judge Henry

thinks I do yet. But instead of being grateful for what I had, I used to go down on my silly young knees imploring the Lord to let me shrink."

"Gracious! What's that?" she exclaimed, with a startled turn of the head. A small brown shadow had darted out from among the sassafras bushes and now hung inert, dangling from the rear.

"It's only Anguish," laughed Ariadne. "That's his chief joy in life — stealing rides."

"He won't be left to this particular joy very long after Dick Kyarter catches sight of him," remarked Cousin Nellie.

Even as she spoke Dick Carter was writhing like a cutworm in his efforts to stand up. One pink, baby hand had grasped Anguish's bird-like claws, the tips of which just showed above the cushions.

"Climb over, Anguish, and sit on the other side," ordered Dick Carter's mother. "You can help Loovenia hold him in."

"I skeered Mammy'll wallop me, Miss Nellie," said Anguish in a high, thin voice that seemed to come from far away. His bat-like face, with its crescent of glittering teeth, rose gradually into view.

Dick Carter flung down his turtle and began to emit ear-piercing shrieks of welcome, at the same time struggling more fiercely to gain his feet.

"Get in at *once!*" repeated Mrs. Henry in a tone that made the little darkie vault. "That child will be in the middle of the road if you don't make haste. Mammy shan't wallop you. I've brought her a bundle of quilt pieces that will make her so happy she will never think of it."

The speaker paused, smiling, yet a little anxious, until she could see the absurd little group adjusted to her

satisfaction. Dick Carter had precipitated himself boldly upon the newcomer and now gazed upward to the elfin visage with the adoring eyes of a Holy Infant on the Madonna's breast. Loovenia, resenting his defecation, sat very straight, her pig-tails vibrant, the whites of her large eyes rolling disapprobation; while the turtle upon the floor, poking out a battered yet hopeful skull, scrambled off madly to the farthest corner.

"He's all right now," murmured the mother fondly. Facing about, she moved her shoulders a trifle and then took up conversation on a new key.

"Grandma all right?"

"Yeh — yes'm," replied Ariadne. "She hasn't been sick any."

"Where is your father now?"

"In Charleston." Ariadne leaned forward to do something unnecessary to the reins. Mrs. Henry noticed how the embarrassed color flew into the girl's averted cheek.

"He's been going there a good deal lately," Mrs. Henry now asserted. Her tone had not implied a question, but Ariadne, growing more confused, answered hastily: "Yes'm. It's something about selling coal to the Navy, I believe."

Cousin Nellie straightened the locket on her breast. It contained a beautiful miniature of Dick Carter. "He and Judge Henry are making money hand over fist out of those mines," she stated pleasantly. "It's almost ridiculous to think of Virginians getting rich. The old generation will consider us vulgar. They're sure to. But I reckon we can stand it." She laughed softly. "Just at the present day there's nothing quite so good to have as money — not even family."

"Oh, Cousin Nellie!" cried the girl in a shocked voice.

"It's true as truth. But you needn't tell your grandmother."

The brick gate-posts of Allan Water showed now through the clustered junipers; in a few moments the white pillars of the house would appear.

"Cousin Nellie," began the girl, almost in a whisper, "did you ever go to Charleston?"

Mrs. Henry's shrewd gray eyes gave one flicker and were instantly controlled. She did not look at the girl but answered carelessly: "Why, yes, quite often. I have visited there before my marriage, and since. Why do you ask?"

"Did you ever know a lady named Miss *May-rant*? With a funny sort of first name, like Donna? Yes, that is it — Miss Donna *May-rant*."

Mrs. Henry all at once seemed to settle into a heavier mass. "Donna *May-rant*, it is. You emphasize the second syllable. Yes. I have met her. So it's true!"

"What's true?" Ariadne faltered hypocritically.

"That your father is going to marry her."

The girl's eyes distended with excitement. "Then it isn't a secret. Everybody has heard. Oh, please tell me something about her, Cousin Nellie, everything! I am just crazy to hear."

Mrs. Henry turned a little slowly to the eager voice. "When did Ransome write?"

"Only this morning. That is, Grandma got his letter this morning. There was a long message in it for me — such a beautiful message!"

The elder woman's eyes were quite inscrutable. She took Ariadne's free hand in both her own.

"I'll read it to you when we get home," the girl went on brightly, after giving the warm, kindly hands a returning squeeze. "At first it seemed so awfully queer

that father was to get married. Grandma doesn't like it much. I didn't know that old people like father could get married. But she isn't old!"

"No?" questioned Cousin Nellie softly.

"Not very," admitted Ariadne, trying to be truthful. "She's in her early thirties. That's not very old?" The sweet voice paused on a note of inquiry.

"No, that isn't old," replied Cousin Nellie, and then again she laughed, but this time it was the laugh of a peach on a lower bough that had not felt the sun.

"She's pretty and good and sweet and — and — clinging. Father says so," declared the girl more vehemently. There seemed a sudden, vague necessity for her championship.

"Well, here we are!" cried Mrs. Henry briskly. "There is the old house, bigger and whiter than ever. I'll declare it seems to grow! And there's Cousin Belinda on the front porch, waiting. Bless her sweet old face!" The last words choked a little.

Ariadne looked around, fearing her cousin had swallowed an early gnat. But that energetic lady was now waving a welcome.

"Hello, Cousin Belinda. We are all here and alive. Didn't I pick out a pretty day for coming?"

Uncle Peter, Old Mammy Susan, and the maid, Mandy, now appeared, having come humbly around the corner of the house from the servants' quarters. A wooden-bottomed chair was brought to assist the passengers in their descent.

At the last moment Dick Carter remembered his ter-rapin. The unhappy reptile, dragged from the folds of an old oilcloth lap-robe which had for a few blissful moments afforded it a now-forfeited haven of refuge, was put into the outstretched hands of its tormentor.



Dick fondled it with murmuring, baby lips, turning it as a squirrel does a nut, that no spot should go uncaressed. Had the turtle been quick-witted, here was its chance for a hideous revenge; but before either the opportunity or Dick Carter's rose-like cheek could be seized, Anguish, in a hoarse, terrified voice, was warning: "Don't you hole dat turkle so close yo' face, Master Dick. Ef it grabs yo' mouf, hit won't turn loose till it thunders!"

"That's right, Anguish. You're a good little boy. I'll give you a nickel before I go home. Make him keep the thing away from his face. I wish Randy Carr had never given it to him. Now you and Loovenia take Dick to the kitchen, so we can have some peace," said Mrs. Henry, all in one breath.

Relieved from the precarious delight of her son's presence, Cousin Nellie became once more her genial self. Greetings were exchanged, the contents of the big basket apportioned, the lilacs and syringas, after their meed of praise and delicate sniffing, placed in water, and the two elder ladies, followed by Ariadne, made their way into the sitting-room.

Cousin Nellie did not beat about the bush. Even before looking about for a chair she announced cheerfully: "Well! I've heard the news and I've come to talk it over!"

Mrs. Bannister appeared to hesitate. Her own method of approach would have been more gradual. She had not asked "dear Nellie" yet how she stood the journey over or inquired concerning Judge Henry's always excellent health. These little formalities were dear to her secluded life, and this somewhat ruthless overleaping of them increased the agitation she was already striving to suppress.

"Yes — ah — will you take this armchair, Nellie?"

she hastily suggested. "Or do you prefer a rocker? This, as you know, is my usual nook, here in the chimney corner." While speaking she had seated herself in a high-backed, carved armchair that suited her as a mediæval niche its sculptured image. She leaned back, careful that the straight old shoulders should touch.

Mrs. Bannister had been reared in the belief that no gentlewoman should relax except in the privacy of her chamber. The modern method of slouching and throwing one's self about was most reprehensible. As for putting elbows on a dining-table! One's feet would be scarcely less vulgar.

The visitor, less than usually considerate of these old-world prejudices, now drew forward the only rocking-chair, deposited herself with a sigh of satisfaction, and after a few slight lateral movements such as a hen makes in her final adjustment to a straw-lined nest, looked full at Cousin Belinda with an expression which said: "Now for it!"

Ariadne, not daring to sit down till she was bidden, hovered near. She longed desperately to remain and was in corresponding suspense as to her probable banishment. There were so many topics that her grandmother considered her "too young to understand."

Mrs. Henry's kindly, shrewd eyes took in the situation. She held out a plump hand. "Come here, honey. Pull up that cricket and sit by me," she said.

Ariadne flew to obey. At Mrs. Bannister's perturbed glance, Cousin Nellie added, by way of explanation: "The child is naturally dying to hear about her new stepmother." Then, as the young back was turned, one of those looks of fundamental intelligence flashed between the elder women. No megaphone could have stated more clearly: "I won't say a thing before her

that she shouldn't hear; but just wait till we are *alone!*"

Ariadne literally flung herself on the stool. One gingham-clad elbow was on Cousin Nellie's knee, and the delicate, pink-shifting face showed upturned eyes that were dark with expectation.

"To begin at the beginning," said the oracle in a tone pregnant with things to come, "you'll remember, Cousin Belinda, that when I went to the Virginia Female Institute my roommate and best friend was Betty Ravenal of Charleston?"

"Quite distinctly. You brought her here once or twice. A very prepossessing young person."

"Of course that was years and years ago," said Cousin Nellie, with a gesture that hinted her disdain of time. "Well, she married much earlier than I did, and her children began coming at once. She didn't have to wait nearly ten years, as I waited for Dick Kyarter, bless him! I do hope those little darkies aren't feeding him." A maternal frown gathered. She looked uncertainly toward the door.

"Susan is competent to see that no harm comes to the child," Mrs. Bannister assured her. There was a touch of impatience in the gentle voice. The narrative must not swerve, just then.

"Betty's husband, who was also her cousin, wasn't very well off," the speaker continued equably. "She was tied pretty close to home, so I did most of the visiting. I've been there often — the last time just about a year ago."

Mrs. Bannister leaned forward. "And on these visits — did you?"

She paused. Ariadne gave an excited gasp. The butter was beginning to come.

"I did!" announced Cousin Nellie dramatically. "She was never a really intimate friend of Betty's, though there is some distant relationship between them; but naturally, in a little place like Charleston, everybody knows everybody else. I saw Miss Mayrant often, and I heard — well, I heard her spoken of."

"What exactly does she look like?" breathed Ariadne.

"Let me see," considered the narrator, screwing up her eyes as if for inward vision. "She's rather small. Not homely — in fact, I suppose she's what you'd call sweet-looking."

"Of course," murmured Ariadne, with a smile.

"And she is blond — yes, very blond." Another pause in which Mrs. Bannister swiftly sought her cousin's eyes. Again passed the look of cryptic understanding. The old lady bristled.

"But did you ever hear her speak? Did you talk to her, and did she have any idea you were kin to us?" the girl began in a torrent of unsatisfied questioning, when suddenly from the kitchen wing came ominous sounds, and in another instant Anguish, his face for once answering to his name, had burst into the room.

"O-o-ole Miss," he stammered. "Mars Dick's done drapped his turkle in de churn!"

"Great Heavens!" ejaculated the mother, getting to her feet.

"An-an' fo' nobody could ketch him, he'd done popped in atter it. De buttermilk is tricklin' off'n him, an'—"

But no further words were needed. In at the open door staggered baby Dick, his screams diluted by the buttermilk, his curly head and clean linen suit plastered as with a surface of greasy calcimine.

Loovenia, her orbs revolving with terror, came close behind, making vague and futile clutches toward her charge.

"Oh, Dick Kyarter, Dick Kyarter, you'll drive me insane yet!" moaned Mrs. Henry. At the sound of her voice, Dick made a lunge in that direction. Ariadne was there in time. "Don't touch him, Cousin Nellie. You've got on such a pretty new dress. I'll take him up-stairs. He will go with me. Won't you come with Cousin Airey, Dicky?" She knelt, holding out coaxing arms.

Dick Carter nodded and sent an approving glance through the buttermilk. He liked the taste, and had now come to a standstill, and was occupied in holding out his tongue, as clean and red as that of a young puppy, to catch the buttermilk that rolled slowly downward from his hair, his chubby cheeks, and his nose.

"All right," said Mrs. Henry. "But Loovenia had better carry him up for you. She's already full of buttermilk. Anguish, go right away and fetch a basin of warm water and soda to wipe up these puddles. They won't stain your floor, Cousin Belinda," she assured the old lady, who had remained rigid and speechless during this tempestuous scene. "I've had to learn the way to remove every spilled liquid on earth, from ink and shoe-polish down to smashed caterpillars."

When the spots had been successfully taken off and privacy restored, Mrs. Henry, drawing her chair nearer and speaking in a lower and more hurried tone, said: "Wasn't it fortunate that Ariadne offered to take Dick Kyarter? I didn't see how we were going to get rid of the dear child without hurting her feelings, and I simply had to get you alone. I've only begun to tell you! Oh, Cousin Belinda, it's awful — perfectly awful!"

"I felt it, my dear. I knew it," quavered the elder lady.

"She's a sentimental, die-away old maid, who has been on a man-hunt all her life. Oh, I know my words are indelicate!" The interpolation was occasioned by a strangled exclamation from her listener. "But I can't think of any other way to express it. She considers herself a poetess, and gets little namby-pamby dabs about her loneliness and when-will-the-fairy-Prince-come-riding-by? printed occasionally in the upper, right-hand corner of the *Charleston Times*. Betty sent me one a few days ago."

"Oh, not over her own name — not over her own name!" moaned Mrs. Bannister.

"I believe she does use a fancy pen-name — Christabel, or Xenobia, or Casabianca, or something of the sort," soothed Cousin Nellie. Instead of the last name she had meant to say Cassandra, but this was no time for classical niceties.

"But her position in life — her — her — connections?" These to the aristocratic old questioner were even more important than the fact of keeping her name out of print.

"She doesn't seem to have any close ones, but drifts around in spots, living on near relatives."

"My dear, that sounds like a pariah!" protested the other.

Mrs. Henry shook her head. "I know. And even then she quarrels with them. Betty says so. It is only because they are so thankful to get rid of her that George Ravenal and his wife have her there now, and are letting her be married from their house. Kind-hearted Betty put her up for a while, but when she found that the silly creature burned joss-sticks before a portrait of Lord Byron and confessed openly that she had read 'Don Jew-an' till she could say it backwards, Betty felt that

it was not right to her growing girls to keep such a creature in the house."

"Byron! Don Jew-an," gasped the grandmother. "Oh, my poor little Ariadne—my little innocent, unspotted Ariadne," she wailed, and began to fumble in her beaded reticule for a handkerchief.

Mrs. Henry's bright face clouded. "Yes, that is the very worst of it," she sighed. "To have a lovely, just-expanding girl like Airey come under such an unwholesome influence. What I am hoping for is that the middle-aged love-birds will be so engrossed with each other they will let Ariadne live with us. You are coming to Culpeper at once, Cousin Belinda. That's understood, of course."

Mrs. Bannister touched one eye and then the other with the handkerchief.

"Thank you tenderly, dear child. It is very comforting to know that I shall not be entirely friendless. But, as yet, I have given little thought to my future. Perhaps I shall decide to reopen my own home, 'Little Barton,' taking Susan and Peter with me. They are Bannister, not Skipwith servants, as you know."

"Well, there's no need of worrying about that at present. Such things work themselves out, and you can't unscramble an egg," declared Mrs. Henry. "Now, if you don't mind, I would like to hear exactly what Ransome said of his coming marriage."

"The letter is here in my bag," said the elder lady, again making the black beads wink and sparkle. "You had better read it all."

Mrs. Henry skimmed rapidly through the pages. A look, at first critical and then almost ironic, grew in her pleasant, down-bent face.

"To be married immediately—umph—umph—! A

wedding journey to New York. That's to give Ransome a chance to buy her trousseau. Just like her! Sweet — clinging — wants Ariadne to love her — mush and molasses!" cried the exasperated reader, flinging the pages down. "She's a bigger fool than I thought, Cousin Belinda, and that says a good deal!"

As Mrs. Bannister's startled eyes remained unenlightened, the other explained, more lucidly: "I mean, in the way she is managing things. The engagement should have been announced a month before, at least. Some sort of invitations should have been printed. You see, I know Donna Mayrant! As for not insisting on Ariadne's being present at the wedding, that is so stupid that it's criminal. They should have tried to get you there, too."

"Me!" echoed the old lady. Her mild eyes emitted sparks. The slender figure grew so erect that it might have crackled. Her chest seemed to expand. "Never!"

Mrs. Henry laughed. "Well, none of us have been urged," she said good-naturedly, "which is as much of a relief to us as it is a fatal mistake for them. She's evidently dished poor Ransome to a turn — fried on both sides with parsley around the edges."

"I don't see that it is exactly an occasion for levity," remarked Mrs. Bannister, who did not like being laughed at. But in a moment more her tone had altered.

"How could such a woman attract my son-in-law?" she asked dejectedly. "A man so full of tenderness and chivalry, so utterly devoted to his child! As for me, no true son could have been dearer or more considerate. He worshiped his young wife, too. With his head bowed upon my breast he told me that he never would look at another woman." The scrap of handkerchief came into renewed service.



"Yes, and he was on your breast while he still thought himself broken-hearted. Also he was just a little over thirty. Ransome has reached the age where most men make fools of themselves. I am keeping an extra eye on Judge Henry, you can bet. I never expect to draw a really easy breath until he is well over sixty."

Ignoring the shocked and stammering remonstrance of her listener, Mrs. Henry went on in cool, practical tones: "As for his tenderness, and sentiment, and chivalry — that's just what's done it. Donna Mayrant has worked her forlorn condition to good effect at last. A more worldly, ordinary man would have seen her for just what she is — a smirking, painted, little humbug!"

Mrs. Bannister gave a gesture and a low cry of protest.

"Stop, Helen! You surely did not say painted! Ransome would never touch a painted woman!"

"Not if he knew it," said the other coolly. "But he doesn't. That's just Donna's point. In these days of white veils and pink-shaded lamps, any woman could have fooled Ransome Skipwith. She's made him believe that she's in the early thirties."

"Apparently she has. Is the deceitful minx much over?"

"Thirty!" sniffed Mrs. Henry, with scorn. "That woman will never see forty this side of the Happy Land."

At this the old lady leaned back, speechless. The heaped-up revelations smothered her power of thought. Mrs. Henry rocked back and forth in the silence, then she lifted her head. Sounds of young feet scurrying up-stairs reminded her of things yet to be said. She sat upright and shook out her feathers.

"I believe that's all," she remarked. "You know as much as I do now. The prospect isn't cheerful, but

I think we both agree that Ariadne must not be prejudiced in advance. She'll soon see through the creature. In the meantime there are some practical things to be done. The honeymoon couple won't be here for a couple of weeks at the earliest. You're obliged to do a little fixing up for them — new hangings in the guest-chamber, perhaps some new table linen, and most important of all, new clothes for Ariadne."

Mrs. Bannister looked up wanly.

"I've brought the latest New York Kirby catalogue along," asserted Cousin Nellie. She now began feeling about in a large, blue leather shopping-bag, at the same time hitching her chair, by inches, up to the elder lady's side. "The fashions this year are perfectly lovely, especially for young girls. Have you noticed how pretty Ariadne is growing?"

"Sh-sh-sh!" warned Mrs. Bannister, coming back to life and casting an apprehensive look at the door. "She might hear you."

"What harm if she does?"

"My dear! Would you brush away the charm, the modesty that is the bloom of dawning womanhood? Ariadne must never suspect —"

"That she's good enough to eat, this minute?" finished the other, laughing. "You don't mind hearing it, I see. You are beaming like a row of hollyhocks right now. Look at this little blue frock on page eleven. I have already marked it."

Mrs. Bannister put on her spectacles and bent over eagerly.

"Can't you just see Ariadne in it? And this wide leghorn with the wreath of cornflowers — and this little white serge Norfolk jacket trimmed in blue —"

"Yes, they are charming — very sweet and girlish,"

said the grandmother, flushing with increased pleasure. Then her face fell. "But, Nellie, my dear, what prices ! The hat alone is eighteen dollars. Eighteen ! Why, in my day —"

"But it isn't your day now, Cousin Belinda. It is Ariadne's day. Her father has the money, and I don't propose to have him sticking Paris hats all over Donna Mayrant's peroxided curls, while his only daughter wears sunbonnets !"

"Let us look at some of the other dresses, the more expensive ones," cried the old lady feverishly. "And I am sure the child needs several hats — several !"

## CHAPTER III

THE wedding which was to mean so much in Ariadne's life had taken place.

As was its courtly wont, the Charleston *Times* gave an impassioned, if verbose, account of the nuptial scene, describing it as a "quiet hour of sweet solemnity, in which the stalwart groom and dainty, blushing bride plighted their troth each to each."

Mrs. Henry sent two copies of the newspaper to Allan Water. The annotations in her vigorous handwriting, scribbled along the edge of one, were for Mrs. Bannister's eyes alone.

Existence in the old Virginia home just now was, in spite of threatened changes, a busy and enjoyable affair. Mr. Skipwith had urged, by letter, that no expense be spared in the new decorations. Boxes arriving constantly from New York contained not only charming clothes for Ariadne, but handsome new window hangings, bureau scarfs, napery, rich rugs, and ornaments of a kind that never appeared in the shopping haunts of Culpeper.

Ariadne, during these days of preparation, gained vivacity and color. To the old grandmother's yearning eyes she seemed to grow hourly more beautiful.

Now, from the blissful couple in New York, letters began to arrive, and one on lavender-tinted paper scented with the same perfume was directed to Miss Ariadne Skipwith. Her young eyes devoured each comma. She had never read such tender, endearing words before,

nor had she been directly appealed to for her "love." In fact this thrilling word, together with that other one of "marriage," to which she had so recently become accustomed, had been little used in the old-fashioned household.

She had opened and read this letter in her grandmother's presence. As it was finished, she instinctively held it out. Mrs. Bannister had been watching the girl's flushed, tender face. At the sudden offering of the fragrant note, the old lady's hand went forward a few hesitating inches, and was then, more decisively, drawn away.

"Thank you, dear," she said in a hurried and embarrassed tone. "But I feel that I should not read Mrs. Skipwith's letter unless she has specially requested it."

Ariadne's eyes fell. Mrs. Skipwith had not requested it, and after a few moments of silence, which both felt to be prophetic of deeper misunderstandings, the girl slowly refolded her precious missive and carried it off to her room to be hidden away with the clipping from the *Charleston Times*.

Left alone, the grandmother pressed her frail hands against her breast. It perhaps had not been a wise or a politic move to repulse the girl's confidence, and yet she could scarcely have acted differently. Later on Ariadne would understand for herself why there could never be anything in common between her grandmother and the new mistress of Allan Water. For the present she must bear the child's hurt eyes and sweet face of reproachful incredulity.

Later in the day Mrs. Bannister announced her final decision to leave for Culpeper the morning after Mr. Skipwith's arrival. Ariadne now acquiesced in silence. Her protestations and childish arguments were exhausted.

Even Cousin Nellie, who came as often as possible to assist with the refurnishing of the house, assured the girl that, under the circumstances, it was the only dignified move for the old lady.

"Your father insists upon your remaining here," the kindly soul added. "That is natural, too. But Grandma and I hope to steal you often for little visits."

"All the world is changing," thought the child. "I suppose this is only part of it."

At last came the exciting telegram: "We arrive tomorrow by the five-thirty from New York."

Ariadne counted the hours out on her fingers. She could scarcely sleep the night before. Next morning at dawn, she woke, and moving softly with bare feet to the window, pushed the green shutters gradually apart. A longing so keen that it was almost a prayer came to her lips and heart. The day must be beautiful! The sun must shine for an event so wonderful!

As the clear pink light streamed full upon her, she gave a little cry of rapture. The whole east was an opening tea-rose. The earth smelled of it. High overhead small, amber-colored clouds like moths dissolved in golden light. The sun behind the farther hills waved plumes of radiant triumph.

Slowly her eyes came back to more familiar things. The great trees on the lawn had actually grown taller. Surely the red-oak never held its head so high before? The wide expanse of turf, cut by the long white driveway, showed sparkling stardust instead of ordinary dew, and toward the valley there were slow shifting scarfs of night mists, gray gossamer tinged with pink, moving among the dark, sharp tips of cedars.

It was hard to wait there for the breakfast bell, but she did so, busying herself with putting the room to

rights, and pausing now and again to look at her father's photograph or to read, once more, the letters that had come to her from Donna.

She went down-stairs quietly, greeting the old lady with the usual kiss and the inquiry :

"Did you sleep well, grandma?"

Something sweet and sensitive in the young heart told her that on this, more than on all other days her grandmother would wish the quiet routine of the house preserved.

The morning meal passed without incident. Mrs. Bannister made no reference to the approaching arrival, though each knew that the other thought of little else.

Immediately after, Ariadne went into the garden for an armful of pink roses. These she had begun to arrange in the bowl under her mother's portrait when Mrs. Bannister, entering by another door with a basket of white lilacs, interrupted her, saying gently :

"Yours are for the bridal chamber, Ariadne. We need white flowers here."

The girl took up the rejected blossoms and left the room, her face downcast. Everything she did these days seemed to give her grandmother fresh pain. Her childish thought had been to let the young mother share in the day's brightness, but grandma's tone had made the desire seem disloyal, even indelicate.

After this the hours grew more and more interminable. No matter how carefully she trod, there were always nettles in the path.

Small frictions came unexpectedly, impatient words were spoken, and for alternative there were dreary intervals of silence that apparently were to have no end.

Old Peter and Mammy could be heard quarreling in

the kitchen. Mandy went across the back-yard, tossing her head ; and muffled shrieks from Anguish told of a "wallopin'" which, for once, he probably did not deserve.

"I believe the horses are biting each other out in the stables," thought the girl almost in despair, wandering from room to room. As with her granddaughter, old Mrs. Bannister could find no place of rest ; she who was usually so placid did not remain seated for five minutes at a time. Even her Bible failed to comfort her.

But, in their halting fashion, the afternoon hours finally dragged through. At last it was time to start.

Ariadne was to wear the blue linen frock chosen from the New York catalogue, and with it the wide hat trimmed with cornflowers. In the white gloves demanded by this elaborate costume, she could not afford to drive, so it became the proud duty of Anguish himself, resplendent in an entire new outfit, to "take Miss Airey to meet her Paw and de lady."

Uncle Peter had already rumbled off in the blue cart, which was to convey the bride's luggage.

"She's sure to have a dozen trunks — all new," Cousin Nellie had prophesied, with meaning.

Of the two young creatures in the phaëton it would be difficult to say which one felt the greater relief. There was no joy visible at first in either face. The gloom of the day, compelled as it were by their elders, still clung about them. Ariadne, when she had passed the gate, drew a long breath that sounded like thanksgiving. The little darkey rolled one eye toward her, then gave the reins a vicious flap.

Ariadne for the first time glanced at him. There was something comic and yet pathetic in the expression of his small visage. It always reminded her, in its rare intervals of repose, of a pickled walnut. To-day



the vinegar was very, very sour. Evidently old Mammy's hand had been unusually heavy.

"That's a splendid new suit of clothes, Anguish," she remarked, with the kindly impulse of cheering him up.

"Yassum," was the laconic reply. His nether lip protruded still another inch.

"Was Mammy very cross to-day?" asked the girl sympathetically.

Anguish rolled both eyes this time.

"Wuz she cross?" he echoed bitterly. "Miss Airey — Mammy's most done skunt me — dat's what she's done."

The girl suppressed an exclamation of condolence. It would not do for the young mistress to encourage rebellion against authority, yet she understood only too well. In a more intimate and subtle way she also had been pretty nearly "skunt."

"I'm sure that you have been naughty if Mammy wished to skin you," she said rather tamely, and then looked steadily away from him in order to prevent any further confidences.

But Anguish was now vocal with his wrongs.

"I wuzn't doin' nothin' at all — not nothin'! Jes' settin' in de corner snappin' snap-beans, like she done tole me to. Some hot skillet grease popped out on Uncle Peter — an' when he cussed, Mammy jes' na'chally turnt round an' beat on me!"

"Well, never mind," Ariadne could not refrain from saying. "Father is coming; everything will be all right when he gets here."

"I'se gwinter tell Mister Ransome on Mammy, too," muttered the boy.

Ariadne remained silent. She had gone too far already. The absurd little shape beside her continued,

at intervals, to mumble threats of vengeance, but she pretended not to hear them. The smell of the woods and the blue sky overhead were stealing from them both the irritation of past trials.

At the station Ariadne found Mr. Crane in a cheap suit of red-brown, the exact color of his largest freckle. Mrs. Crane, also in a new Culpeper creation, a purple cotton foulard with green pansies, vibrated near. Their greetings to Ariadne were hushed and decorous. Already their expressions had been adjusted to the importance of the coming event. After a moment's struggle with her sense of propriety, Mrs. Crane said in a loud church whisper :

"We're all dyked up fer it, ain't we, Miss Airey? That's a reel pretty dress you got on. Mine's from Culpeper, too." She moved her white cotton gloves caressingly across the gleaming folds of her skirt, and the glance sent down among her staring pansies showed that in their owner's eyes, at least, comparison did not wilt them.

As the train came in and Ariadne saw her father's tall and still athletic figure spring to earth and stand with upraised arms, waiting, a feeling of shyness, almost fear, drove her back to the shelter of the waiting-room door.

The Cranes, unhampered by timidity, rushed forward in a brace.

"Why, hello, Jasper !" Ariadne heard her father cry. "Madonna, this is one of my boyhood chums. Old Jas' and I have been on many a 'possum hunt together. And here is Mrs. Crane. How nice to see you both. May I present my wife, Mrs. Skipwith ?"

"I am always happy to meet any of my dear husband's friends," said a thin, childish voice sweetly.

Ariadne peered forth a few inches. The voice had

been to her a chime of silver. She saw a little figure all in blue, of a tone so vivid that her own cherished linen seemed faded, moving with pretty, timid steps toward the Cranes. Mrs. Crane responded at once to the cordial hand-clasp, but her lord, fallen suddenly shy, looked down at the white kid morsel dubiously, until, recalled to better manners by a scornful prod from Mrs. Crane, he seized it feverishly and began pumping it up and down.

"But where is my daughter? Hasn't she come?" Mr. Skipwith was beginning, when he caught sight of the shrinking, cornflower hat. "There she is," he exclaimed, laughing. "Come here, you monkey; what are you hiding for? I want you."

She was in his arms now, clinging to him silently — tremulously. They had never been parted for so many days. Even the new stepmother was for the instant forgotten.

"Father — father — I've missed you so," she whispered.

"And this is Ariadne!" cried the high, silvery voice. A small white hand stole in between them.

"Let her go, Ransome. She belongs to me, too. I'm crazy to see her! Oh, you dear, pretty child! You will love me, won't you?"

Her arms, the wind-blown, fluttering veils of white and blue, and the scent of violets closed about the girl in one bewildering, perfumed cloud.

"Say you are going to love me," pleaded the little figure, standing on tip-toe to kiss her daughter's cheek.

"Why — yes — of course — I — I — do," stammered Ariadne, leaning down farther.

Mr. Skipwith flung his strong arms about them both. His eyes stung with happiness.

"Pretty lucky fellow, don't you think, Jas'?" he called out boyishly.

Mrs. Crane gathered up her green pansies. She thought Mr. Skipwith's exhibition somewhat undignified — the people in the train were grinning. She was thankful that now it had started on its noisy way.

But Ransome Skipwith was beyond self-consciousness. He longed to laugh aloud, to cry, to turn somersaults or punch somebody, just as thirty years before he might have done when he had been given a circus ticket.

Now he caught sight of Anguish grinning from ear to ear.

"Anguish — you black rascal — that surely isn't you?" he shouted boisterously.

"Yas, sir, Mister Ransun, hit's me."

"But you've grown since I saw you. You're 'most as big as Mr. Crane now. And by the Lord Harry! a bran' new suit of clothes!"

Anguish, in his writhing ecstasy, bade fair to lose the commended garments.

"Look at my shoes, Mister Ransun," he stuttered hysterically, and thrust forth one tan-clad foot and then the other. "Dey cost free dollars — an' de shoe-strings is got gold tassels."

Mr. Skipwith threw back his head and roared until the boards shook under him, at which Anguish, now frenzied with joy, executed a series of hand-springs, new shoes and all, that very nearly precipitated him into a red-clay gully.

The green pansies had withdrawn themselves.

"Mercy — what is the creature doing?" cried Mrs. Skipwith, as Anguish revolved past. She clung to her husband's arm for protection.

"Only what I'd like to do myself," laughed Mr. Skip-

with. "Well, we must see to your trunks and start home. Doesn't that sound good, Madonna — home!"

At his smile, she nestled even closer and touched his shoulder with her veils.

"Here is old Peter," Mr. Skipwith went on. "Come here, Peter, and be presented to your new mistress."

Peter came slowly; there was dignity and a certain protest in the shambling figure.

"I'ze pleezed to see yo', ve'y good health, Marse Ransome," he said, ducking his woolly head. "An I'ze proud to meet Mis' Skipwif. My mistus sends her compliments and sez she is waitin' up at de Big House."

Mrs. Skipwith's trunks made an imposing pyramid on the little platform. There was not a dozen of them, but there were several, and each was newer than the other. Peter needed assistance to fit them all into the once-blue cart.

At the double phaëton, Donna, slipping into the back seat, gave her husband a playful little push forward.

"You sit with the driver, Ransome," she commanded. "I want Ariadne here with me."

The little journey, often a tedious, jogging affair, passed for Ariadne like the flight of a tropic bird.

Gazing through the many layers of tissue at her step-mother, she caught entrancing glimpses of red lips, flushed cheeks, clustering, yellow ringlets and eyes held very wide open, like those of little Dick Carter; one small hand caressed her own. Madonna's aura was perfume, her sentences dripped honey. Again and again she spoke of the affection which was to be theirs, binding them forever; and each time the girl's timid assent was given with increased sincerity.

"Oh, my dear, if you but knew how sad and lonely my life has been, you would realize what this happiness

of winning a strong man's love, and now of having his own dear child to cherish, must seem to me," the little woman whispered.

Ariadne gazed back dumbly. She had no words, but her heart ached with the new tenderness.

"Sometimes I have a dreadful feeling that it cannot last," Madonna went on, seeing how earnestly her words were being taken. "It is too much! I am afraid every minute of waking as from a wonderful dream."

"No, you will never wake," answered Ariadne, in a voice that thrilled. "We are all going to be happy forever and ever!"

"My little sister! My own precious little sister!" murmured the other, and for a moment lifted the girl's hand to her cheek.

Ariadne's eyes looked out a little wistfully. She had said that all were to be happy. But what of Grandma and the old, before-the-war trunks already packed?

She stole another look at her companion's pink-veiled face. Her own cleared. No one, not even Mrs. Bannister, could long resist such pleading accents, or refuse the affection so pathetically desired.

When the gateway came into view, and Mr. Skipwith turned to announce it to his bride, her excitement became intense. She moved her head all ways at once. When the Big House appeared, its stately columns draped as if in her honor with a tapestry of purple wistaria flowers, she clapped her hands and cried out her admiration.

"Oh, it is even bigger and handsomer than I had hoped!" she exclaimed.

"And there is Grandma, standing on the porch to welcome us," added the girl.

The old lady, in her black silk and priceless laces,

erect, slender, and patrician to her trembling fingertips, stood just beyond the curtain of amethystine flowers.

Mr. Skipwith got from the phaëton first, and looking up to her, bared his head and called the one word "Mother!" The old lady smiled and bent her white crown an inch.

Donna was lifted out bodily. As he set her down, Ransome drew one arm through his own and hurried her up the shallow steps.

Mrs. Bannister did not advance; she extended one of her hands to an unnecessary distance and said stiffly:

"Mrs. Skipwith, I believe? I trust your journey has not been too fatiguing."

"Madonna, allow me to present my mother-in-law, Mrs. Bannister," said Ransome, even more stiffly. In spite of his instantaneous acceptance of the old lady's attitude, he could not restrain a glance of pained inquiry toward Ariadne. Her young eyes were flashing. With her head in the air she came swiftly to Donna's other side.

"Supper can be served at once, if you are ready for it," said the old lady. Then, with an increase of frigid courtesy, she added, speaking directly to the little figure: "Or perhaps Mrs. Skipwith prefers to go to her room first."

"Yes — thanks," murmured Donna. "I would prefer that. Where is my hand-bag, Ransome?"

"I've got it, Donna," said the girl, speaking her step-mother's name for the first time. "I'll go up with you."

Donna smiled at her.

"Only to show me the way, dear. I must get the dust of travel off alone. No, I don't want you, Ransome.

I'm sure Mrs. Bannister has things to say to you. I'll be down again in five minutes."

She and Ariadne hurried off, leaving a trail of violets.

Mrs. Bannister, putting her handkerchief to her nose, turned and walked into the house.

Mr. Skipwith stared after her in silence. Astonishment and incredulity made his face, at first, a blank. Then anger came — only a flash of it — for pain, swiftly following, blotted out all other expression. He lit a cigarette, but almost immediately cast it down. At last, with brows drawn heavily, he began a slow pacing of the long veranda.

Within doors Mrs. Bannister, too, was walking restlessly. For nearly fourteen years this man had been to her as a devoted son. No words but those of affection had ever passed between them. Now she had failed him — had seemed willing to give deliberate suffering. It was a fitting climax to this most dreadful day. Well, to-morrow she would be away, and the love-feast could go on without interruption. Ariadne appeared at the door an instant, and then, seeing that her father was not there, hurried out to the porch to join him.

Mrs. Skipwith remained up-stairs much longer than five minutes. Mammy Susan in the kitchen was grumbling that "de chicken would be tough ez turkey-buzzard if it wasn't et soon." And Ransome had impatiently lighted a third cigarette before he heard his name called from the stairway.

He went in hurriedly to meet her, Ariadne at his heels, and before entering the room where the austere figure of Mrs. Bannister presided, took Donna into his arms, holding her close in an unspoken apology.

It was a delicate and chivalrous act of homage, but with a sort of nervous simper the little woman pushed



him away, saying that he mustn't spoil her hair. At the door she turned quickly and flicked the coat lapel which her cheek had brushed.

Mrs. Bannister, bowing distantly, motioned the new wife to the head of the table where she herself had always sat. The tall, carved chair was moved now to the side, facing the mantel and Virginia Skipwith's portrait.

Under the light of the swinging lamp, the table gleamed and sparkled. Pink flowers were in the center, and the old Skipwith silver shone. Most of the dishes were cold. Hot rolls, fried chicken, and coffee were still to be served.

The meal was to all interminable. Such conversation as could flourish in a soil so antipathetic was given chiefly in the bride's praise of each new delicacy and Mrs. Bannister's stereotyped demurs. The tension increased at each moment, and once, at least, threatened to snap.

During one of the deadly pauses, the newcomer's eyes had strayed upward to the pictured face against the wall; seeing in it another topic for remark, her lips had parted. Suddenly Mrs. Bannister's fork dropped with a crash — a bit of the rare old porcelain was shattered. She made no apology for the awkwardness but began to talk rapidly to her son-in-law, detailing certain repairs upon the place and some needed purchases.

For the rest of the time Donna sat in cowed silence, and when at last it was over, said that she was more fatigued than she had realized and would be glad to be allowed to retire at once.

So the troubled little household soon dispersed, each weary and still-excited soul being thankful that its special ordeal was over.

Ariadne had thought to lie awake as upon the previous

night, but scarcely were her prayers whispered and her young head with its two fair plaits upon the pillow, than sleep found her out. She never knew that two hours later her grandmother came softly into the room, stood at her bedside, and gazed with desolate eyes upon the "one ewe lamb" whom she had begun to lose.

In the morning, all traces of tears and sentiment were gone. Mr. Skipwith and Ariadne both went with Mrs. Bannister to the station. Mrs. Henry and "the judge" were to meet her on her arrival at Culpeper. Farewells were casually spoken, the old lady remarking more than once that after all she was not going very far, and she hoped that Ariadne would be allowed to come often to see her. She did not falter, even at the parting embrace, and Ariadne, waving her handkerchief toward the smiling old face at the train window, felt a great thankfulness that it had all passed off so quietly.

On the drive home, she clung lovingly to her father's arm. Their talk was all of Madonna — for so Mr. Skipwith called her — of improvements at Allan Water, of gay little traveling excursions that the three were sometimes to make. New life, new opportunities, and best of all, a new and loving intimacy with her father's young wife, were held out to her smiling eyes. The uneventful, happy days of the old grandmother's domination were already as turned pages of a book, that was to grow more exciting with each new chapter.

The first week passed in a succession of joyous holidays. During the second week, Mr. Skipwith found that he was compelled to take a flying trip to Charleston. His wife insisted on going with him, and it was decided that Ariadne should be taken as far as Culpeper, and there left with her grandmother and Cousin Nellie until the couple had returned.

The visit was not altogether a happy one. Mrs. Bannister still felt the effects of her recent uprooting, and even Cousin Nellie, being harassed just then by the fact that measles were abroad and Dick Carter certain to catch them, was not her usual sunshiny self.

Also, Ariadne resented the tone in which the two ladies always spoke of Madonna. Loyalty to her father's wife led her into exaggerated statements of affection and admiration, and the commiserating glances exchanged between her listeners added fire to her vehemence.

She was a little surprised at her own willingness to leave her grandmother and tried to soothe her conscience with the belief that it was merely a natural longing for the free air and wide, wind-swept spaces of her home. But this scarcely explained the relief she felt when Cousin Judge suggested that he, alone, should take her to the station.

"Yes, Grandma, that will be lots better," she had seconded with eagerness. "The days are getting hot, and the station is so bare and dusty."

The train by which the couple would arrive, being a fast express, stopped but a moment at so small a town as Culpeper. Mr. Skipwith waited in readiness on one of the vestibule platforms calling at sight of her to "jump in." He and Judge Henry barely achieved a hearty hand-grasp, while Donna waved coquettishly from the drawing-room window.

Mrs. Skipwith welcomed her stepdaughter tenderly, declaring that the few days had been months without her. The red velvet seat, in a corner of which the bride was curled up on one foot, was, for the rest of it, heaped up precariously with books, newspapers, magazines, and candy boxes. Half-wilted flowers stood in the drinking glass, and lay sidewise in the toilet basin of the small,

private dressing-room. Donna was in the highest spirits. Her visit had evidently been a triumphal progress. "They all tried to eat me up, they pretended to be so glad to see me," she assured Ariadne; and then added in a tone that somehow did not seem to be the real Donna, "and maybe I didn't get even with one or two of the old cats."

Mrs. Skipwith and Ariadne sat together, opposite. The man laughed at the gay chatter of his "girls," as he loved to call them; but Ariadne noticed how often he leaned his head against the cushioned back, closing his eyes as if to shut out a glare grown suddenly too strong.

During one such interval she bent an anxious face toward her stepmother. "How white and tired father looks to-day," she whispered. "Didn't he feel well in Charleston?"

Donna glanced up sharply. She frowned as if the question had been a personal affront. "Certainly your father was well. I never saw him better. Aren't you perfectly well, dearest?"

Ransome opened his heavy eyes quickly. "What is it? Yes — why of course I am all right, dear. The sun was pretty hot, you know, and it seems to have brought on a bit of a headache. It amounts to nothing, I assure you."

But now Mrs. Skipwith's face, too, was anxious. She sprang up, precipitating the mass of periodicals and boxes to the floor, and laid her hand upon her husband's forehead. He smiled, pressing the small gloved fingers closer. Ariadne, on her knees, was reaching about for scattered chocolates.

Donna, thoroughly aroused, continued to question him, and finally, seconded by Ariadne, persuaded him

to lie full length on the couch and have a bandage of iced water across his eyes.

"That does feel good," he murmured, and for the remainder of the trip was silent.

That night he ate nothing, went to bed unusually early, and in the morning appeared with large dark circles round the eyes, which spoke of pain. But, manlike, he refused to admit that anything was wrong, declaring that the good night's rest had made him "right as a trivet."

Rising from a scarcely tasted breakfast he said: "I have promised old Peter to go with him on a tour of inspection. He tells me that there are some fences that need mending badly."

"Please take an umbrella then, father," urged Ariadne. "The sun is even hotter than it was yesterday." She ran out into the hall to the old-fashioned, rosewood hat-rack, which had large, zinc-lined holders at its two ends, and came back with an ancient, green cotton specimen that Mr. Skipwith laughingly declared would frighten the cows from their pasture.

"I don't think you should go out at all," insisted his wife. "You did not sleep well, and your eyes look feverish right now."

"Give me the green umbrella," cried Mr. Skipwith, in a tone of comic resignation. "I see that I'm to be henpecked from the start!"

He hurried out through the back door, waving a hand to them and calling loudly for Peter. The two women who loved him watched with troubled eyes.

"I do wish he hadn't!" reiterated Donna. "But men are so contrary. They never listen to advice."

She turned slowly. Ariadne slipped an arm through hers, and they made their way into the pleasant, flower bright living-room.

In the corner, which for so many tranquil years had harbored old Mrs. Bannister's mahogany sewing-table with the crystal knobs beloved of small Dick Carter, a dainty, three-shelved rack of gilded wicker-work now stood, piled with materials for embroidery.

Scarcely were the two seated, and their pretty, useless work begun when there was heard, from the hallway, the scrape and slur of heavy footsteps. Both heads were lifted. "Who on earth can that be?" exclaimed Ariadne. "I never heard that step before."

Mrs. Skipwith began to tremble.

"It's Ransome," she cried. "He must be worse!" She jumped up from the low rocker, while thimble, scissors, and colored silks flew to the winds.

Before it was possible to reach the door, her husband stood there, his face of a greenish pallor spread with a sheen of sweat. He attempted to smile, but pain twisted his lips into a grimace. As Donna flung her arms about him, he writhed and gave a cry, then, with her weight dragging him down, stumbled across the room and fell full length on the leathern couch. His wife sank to her knees, hurling at him a hundred terrified questions.

Ariadne stooping, whispered: "Don't try to ask father anything now. Just wait a minute. I'll go get Mammy." She sped like an arrow into the kitchen. "Oh, Mammy-Susan," she gasped, "father is terribly sick. Go in to him while I write a telegram for Mr. Crane to send to Culpeper. I know that Doctor Buford ought to come."

"Don't look so skeered, chile," comforted Mammy, but nevertheless she had begun to strip the biscuit dough from her fat black hands. "Yo' Paw ain't dyin'! Nobody don't die till dey time comes!"

"Where is Anguish?" the girl went on. "He must ride barebacked to the station."

"Ain't no trouble finding him. Jest look fer de lef' over breakfas' dishes."

Peter stumbled in at the kitchen door. He was mopping his forehead with an old red handkerchief. "Marse Ransome wuz sho' took suddint! Right down by de —"

"Nebber you mind whar he wuz took," broke in Mammy rudely. "You stuff light-wood in under dat kittle till hit screeches!" She now ballooned her majestic way into the living-room.

Ariadne finished her note and went in search of Anguish. For once he was not stalking food. She discovered him halfway up the trellis that inclosed the back gallery, peering in through the glass transom of the dining-room door.

"Get down, Anguish!" she called indignantly.

The little negro dropped like a shot owl, striking the floor with his flat, black feet.

"Go, catch the Kentucky mare, and ride as fast as you want to. This is a telegram for Mr. Crane to send."

Anguish disappeared with a whoop of joy.

Hurrying back to her father, she found old Peter and Mammy in the act of carrying him up-stairs. He had one arm about the bent shoulders of each and managed to walk a little, though it was plain that every step brought agony. The wife followed, whimpering and wringing her hands.

"You stay down here, honey," advised Mammy, catching sight of the girl. "I mout need you to fetch somethin' up."

Ariadne threw herself to the couch, still warm from her

father's tortured body. With fingers pressed into her ears she tried to shut out the sound of that slow, upward progress. It seemed to take an hour, but finally the muffled steps ceased, and she knew they had reached the bedchamber. Old Peter came thumping down the stairs again. She was at the foot to meet him.

"Law, Miss Airey," cried the old man at her sudden apparition. "You sho' did scarify me. You is whiter now dan yo' Paw. Don't you be shakin'! Mammy kin cure ennybody. She sont me down fer de kittle, and she se2 fer you to tote de mustard. Hit's in a yaller box on de shelf behime de stove."

Possessed of these "first aids" the two began the ascent. Mammy's turbaned head gloomed from the upper railing. At sight of it, Ariadne, darting past old Peter at the risk of sending him and the sizzling kettle together down the steps, ran up to her, and questioned breathlessly: "Oh, Mammy, what do you think is really the matter with father?"

"Belly-ache. Jes' plain ole Mr. Belly-ache," answered the old woman in loud and cheerful tones, to which she added, somewhat cryptically: "Dey's more green apples dan dem what grows on trees."

Peter ascended by slow and careful steps. The sound of his fearful breathing could be heard. Mammy's impatient head went farther out into the air. "Dey's cold water up here already," she remarked caustically. "Ennybody would think to see you dat you had nebber toted a kittle till dis day!"

"You needn't gallump lak a hopper-grass, needer!" she called more sharply, when he responded by an obedient spurt. "Fust thing you'll scald yo' fool footses, an' den I'll hatter stop an' tie 'em up. Was de water bilin'?"



"Bofe my laigs is scalted through my pants," retorted Peter, with a reproachful, upward glance.

"Dat's good! Now tote it into de room and set it on de hyarth. Don't slop none on de bran new kyarpit."

She was silent during the mystic fashioning of the poultice. In the quiet, Mr. Skipwith gave a low, smothered moan. Donna, echoing with a cry, crouched on the bed beside him. Mammy looked around by a few inches. "Don't do no good yo' settin' on him when his belly hurts, Miss Skipwif!" she remarked. Donna fell back a little. •

The nurse in charge now bore down on her prey. The plaster lay along her bared left arm; her right was hung with towels.

"Dear old Mammy," smiled Ransome, as she leaned over him. "I'm sorry to give so much trouble. It's really nothing serious, I know."

"Nuttin' or somethin'," silenced the kindly tyrant. "You get yo' close off an' crawl under dem kivers. I'm gwinter put dis mustard whar hit'll do mo' good dan eatin'."

"Peter!" she commanded, "come here an' hep' me strip my baby." Then, in a more significant tone: "You gals ain't got no business here jes' now."

"Come into my room, Donna," said one of the rejected "gals" in haste. "Mammy will call us when we are needed."

Mrs. Skipwith appeared to hesitate. She gave a feebly defiant look upward to the stern, black visage, receiving in return a large, Juno-like glance of scorn. Ariadne took her stepmother's arm.

"It's de Lord's blessin' dat one of 'em's got de sense she wuz born with," old Susan commented, as the two figures vanished.

In Ariadne's chamber, the stepmother gave way to more open remonstrance. She walked restlessly, refusing to sit at all.

"I can't stay away from Ransome. That old woman has no business sending me out. Oh, Ariadne! Suppose anything should happen!"

"You couldn't do anything just now, dear Donna," said the girl, trying to pacify her. "Mammy is a splendid nurse. She makes everybody get well. But she has to manage in her own way. Don't go back till she calls us."

"But this is torment. Must I be shut out while hirelings minister to my darling? A wife's place is at her husband's side."

"Not while his clothes are being taken off," said Ariadne, with youthful candor.

Mrs. Skipwith was checked for an instant, then broke out more vehemently.

"You don't understand anything about it! You are only a child! You know nothing of the sweet intimacies of love."

"Perhaps not, but I know Mammy!" said the girl with meaning.

"You are all against me, I see that!" cried Donna. For a moment she struggled between tears and anger, then flinging herself to the nearest chair, she broke into a passion of sobs.

## CHAPTER IV

WHEN finally Doctor Buford came, even the dauntless and dominant Susan was glad to welcome him. Her hot mustard foot-baths and poultices, supplemented by doses of queer-smelling herb teas, had not produced the desired effect. The pain in Mr. Skipwith's side increased steadily.

At first sight of his patient the old doctor, without having asked a question, called for water and a glass and poured into it a few drops of colorless fluid.

Not until Mr. Skipwith had been made to swallow this did the physician slip on, as it were, his robes of office and begin the usual formulæ of questions and replies.

Donna was upon the bed, her elbow in Ransome's pillow. Ariadne stood near Doctor Buford's chair, ready to be of instantaneous service, while across the room hovered the dark and troubled shadows — old Peter and Mammy Susan — waiting to hear what "Marse Doctor Buford" was to say. All there, except Donna, had been part of Ariadne's childhood.

Doctor Buford turned a little to pat the young girl's hand.

"Looks better already, doesn't he, my dear?" the old man asked, with a congratulatory glance back to his patient.

"Oh, he does, indeed! I am so thankful you've come," answered the girl fervently.

A long sigh of relief came from the background, then

Mammy's muttered admonition: "Better git back to yo' work, Peter — I ain't got a stick er oak-wood to cook my dinner with."

As they turned, the doctor called out genially:

"All you did was exactly right, Susan! I wouldn't swap you now for all the trained nurses in Culpeper."

"Thank you kin'ly, Marse Doctor," said Mammy, her white teeth gleaming.

Old Peter ducked suddenly. Sometimes Mammy's excitement took a belligerent turn. The two went down the stairs together.

"Faithful old servants," murmured Doctor Buford. "It is sad that their generation is so soon to pass. But now to our patient. Seems to have been a pretty sudden attack; ever had one like it before, Skipwith?"

"Never!" put in Donna hastily.

"No — why, that is — yes — come to think of it. I had entirely forgotten. This same sort of pain took me in New York — about two years ago."

"Was a physician called in?"

"Henry insisted on it — Judge Henry of Culpeper, you know. We were up there together on our mining business."

A sudden recollection of the New York doctor's verdict made the sick man give a warning look.

He added hastily: "It didn't amount to much — I got over it in a couple of days and haven't thought of it since."

Doctor Buford's practiced hands were stealing under the bed-clothes.

"Oh, Doctor!" broke in the wife tremulously, "we have all been so terrified! You don't think it anything really serious, do you! I simply couldn't bear —"

"Now don't be in the least alarmed," interrupted the

doctor, in his professionally cheery tone. "I only want to make a slight examination — "

But Skipwith had writhed back from him.

"Not there — don't touch me there — I can't bear it!" he gasped.

Doctor Buford rose and walked to the nearest window, staring down thoughtfully upon a lawn that he did not see. He was vaguely conscious of a small figure sprawling on the grass, but at first his eyes were focused inward.

Anguish had been set to dig from among the grass-roots the insidious crimson tentacles of a weed called by the darkies "creepin' Jesus" — a process of extermination that went on at the rate of one to each five minutes. Near him stood an old tin lard bucket that was to be filled within the hour, or Mammy would know the reason why. As yet the rusty aperture yawned with emptiness.

The reluctant gardener squirmed, looking to the four corners of heaven for a new excuse to shirk, and all at once caught sight of the doctor. Now he bounded to his feet and made a decorous if grinning obeisance. The doctor barely moved his hand in acknowledgment. Even Anguish could not make him smile.

Ransome, watching him in silence, now whispered to Donna that she and Ariadne had better leave.

As the door closed, the physician turned and came back to the patient's bedside.

"Well?" said Ransome, with a note of sharpness. "I can see that you think it serious. Please tell me the facts exactly as they are."

"Pretty bad, Skipwith, pretty bad. Of course, I may overestimate the danger, and I hope to God I do! But as things look to me now, I must tell you

frankly that it is an operation I don't want to undertake alone."

"An operation? Is it as serious as that?"

"It is, and we haven't any time to lose, either. I want to telegraph for a Richmond physician. I can get him here by eight or nine, and I think I can hold you over till then."

"Don't frighten the life out of me before he gets his chance," said Mr. Skipwith, trying to laugh. "Send off the telegram, by all means. And, Doctor," he added, as the old man reached the door, "if you really feel there is any immediate danger, I want Henry here at once. I have never made a will yet."

"Judge Henry and his wife left yesterday for Charleston."

The sick man passed his hand wearily before his eyes.

"Yes, of course, I remember now. He went in my place. Between you and this infernal wild-cat gnawing at my side, I haven't any mind left. But I've got to have a lawyer. Send for that young cub of his, Randolph Carr. He has been admitted to the Bar and is a notary as well. Henry thinks the boy has a brilliant future, but all I need him for is to write down what I dictate."

"I'll send a wire to him at the same time I get off the one to Richmond. I'd better do it in person, too. Old Peter will drive me to the station."

During the afternoon hours Mr. Skipwith was in less pain.

Because of the reaction from an agonizing fear, his wife's spirits returned with almost an excess of gayety. She and Ariadne came and went freely. The doctor, after an excellent luncheon, returned to the sick-room

and stationed himself at the window, where he smoked cigars and discoursed somewhat prosily of recent social events in Culpeper.

With the decrease of actual suffering, Mr. Skipwith's fever grew steadily higher. It restored color to his sunken cheeks and brought such brilliancy to his dark eyes that Mrs. Skipwith again and again called the attention of the others to his altered looks. She was now radiant and seemed to think the possibility of danger already past, apparently not noticing how stereotyped and weary the doctor's answering assurances had become.

But Ariadne was given no such respite. She knew by instinct that her father was desperately ill. She moved about silently, performing each allotted task with a quickness and precision that drew forth the old doctor's admiration. Once, as she hurried from the room to fetch some needed article, he turned to the father, saying with feeling :

"What a lovely girl Ariadne is becoming, Skipwith — a Virginia thoroughbred to the bone !"

"Indeed she is," smiled Ransome, "and as straight and fine in character as she is in body. This little woman here" — he gave a loving glance toward his wife — "has found it out already, haven't you, Madonna?"

Later on Ariadne could not fail to note how often Doctor Buford had begun to consult the clock upon the mantel, nor the frequency with which her father demanded the fluid that brought relief. Once, as the doctor stooped to give it, she caught the glance between them, which seemed to say : "Hadn't we better tell them now?"

Was it imagination, or did the doctor nod? And

did the bright, sunken eyes turn meaningly upon his bride, with the unspoken request: "Get her first from the room?"

A great trembling took the girl. For once she sat down; her knees threatened to give way. No, she had not imagined the sinister exchange of signals, for now Doctor Buford, advancing towards Mrs. Skipwith with old-world courtliness, was asking her to take a stroll with him upon the lawn.

The little woman, much surprised, was about to excuse herself, when the sick man put in hurriedly:

"Yes, go, my dear. You have been cooped up in this room all day. A little air is just the thing for you. Take her along, Buford; Ariadne will stay here with me."

As the two went, Ariadne rose from her chair, and going up swiftly to her father said: "You wanted to see me alone — you sent Donna away on purpose."

He smiled at her intelligence. "What a smart little girl it is," he mocked, trying to speak lightly.

"She — she — doesn't know how sick you are. Oh, father, is it really serious?"

"Sit here on the bed beside me, little comrade. We've had some good times together, haven't we?"

"Oh, yes!" she breathed, looking down upon him with dark, adoring eyes.

"And I hope there are lots more good times in the future. I don't want to frighten you, dear child, but I am in danger, and there are some things I want to say to you alone."

"Yes, daddy, I'm listening," she answered, with a pathetic effort to return his smile.

"Old Buford said you were a thoroughbred and you are, God bless you! Well, it's just this: if anything



should happen, I want you to promise me that Donna shall never be left alone."

As the girl found no words at once, he hurried on:

"There are no fears for you, Ariadne; Virginia is full of friends and relatives. Fortunately, there will be plenty of money for both of you. But Donna cares nothing about that. It is loneliness I dread for her — poor little soul! she is so happy." He shut his eyes a moment. A little groan, whether of physical or mental pain, came from his lips.

"I understand, dear father; you want to be sure that she will always have some one to love and comfort her."

"Yes, that is it. If I — if I should not get well — her grief will be heartrending. I want you to promise not to leave her."

"Oh, father! you know I never would! Even if you had not asked it, I would always be with Donna. She loves me next to you!"

"Dear little comrade," said the man again. "That makes everything so much easier."

"Oh, father! but you *will* get well," she pleaded, her child's heart bursting now with personal grief. She kissed his hands, his hair, his burning cheek.

"Of course, of course," he murmured a little thickly. "But we must think of Madonna. Promise me that no matter what happens, you'll never give her up."

"Never, never!" she said, struggling with her tears.

"No matter what happens," he reiterated. "No matter what the others advise, or what the poor, distracted, little soul herself may do. You'll be with her — holding up her hands —"

"Yes, father!"

"She is not very wise," the stumbling voice went on. "You are only a child yet, Ariadne, but in some ways

you are stronger. If you promise — if you give me your word — I know that you'll keep faith."

"Why, I hear them coming back," said Ariadne, sitting upright. "Somebody is with them."

The sick man's clutch on her two wrists was of burning metal. He, too, sat upright, his brilliant eyes piercing her own.

"The promise — you have not given it, Ariadne. I want to hear you swear that you will never abandon Madonna."

"Father, I swear it. You have my sacred promise never to give Donna up, or let others turn me against her."

"Say, 'So help me, God'!"

"So help me, God," repeated the girl in clear, unfaltering words.

"Now I am satisfied," whispered Ransome Skipwith, falling back as if exhausted on his pillow.

His wife flung open the door.

"Here's Mr. Carr, Ransome — Randy Carr from Culpeper. He says he has come over to see how you are."

Ariadne, without pausing for the conventional greeting, slipped past them to her room and locked the door.

A few moments later she heard Doctor Buford going alone down the broad stairway. Mr. Skipwith, Donna, and the newcomer were left in the sick man's chamber.

Ariadne was thankful for this opportunity of being by herself. Her bewildered thoughts, held back so long as service was required of her, now swarmed like bees about the spot where a familiar hive has stood.

It was not the promise, but her father's almost avid demand for it, that terrified her most. Life had just

begun for her, and now — was she to learn so soon its most fearful lesson?

She clasped her hands, moaning low that the others might not hear her.

There must be some place to turn, some power that would avert so hideous and unbelievable a tragedy. She went to a window that gave upon the kitchen yard. Mammy was throwing scraps to a scrambling, rushing mass of chickens; her gospel hymn, crooned in a rich, throaty voice, came soothingly to the girl's ear. At the corner of the kitchen porch old Peter, in full sunshine, smoked his old corn-cob pipe. Beyond it all the apple orchard, now clothed in green with a myriad tiny buttons that would soon be fruit, climbed to the other side of the valley and paused at the ledge of rock.

Surely in all that peace and beauty the ultimate horror could not find its way!

Retracing her steps, Ariadne went to her door, and partially opening it, listened for her father's voice. Donna was speaking. Her high accents were unshaken. The words, though indistinguishable at this distance, sounded thoughtful — even measured. Now Mr. Skipwith answered. He, too, was calm and spoke with his usual somewhat slow precision. A sudden murmur in a third voice brought to Ariadne the forgotten fact of young Carr's presence. She frowned a little, wondering how he had learned of her father's illness so very quickly; doubtless Doctor Buford had told him as he left Culpeper, and the boy had been sent over on some important business by Judge Henry.

Satisfied by this explanation, Ariadne went back and began to brush her long, fair hair, something she had not thought of since morning. The businesslike voices, too, had helped to restore her confidence. If father could

talk so long on a mere business matter, he was surely in no immediate danger.

She had about decided to go down-stairs to find Doctor Buford and urge him to tell her exactly what he thought, when the door across the hall opened suddenly and she heard some one, evidently young Carr, come out rather quickly and begin the descent of the steps. Her instinct of hospitality sent her flying after. No guest must be allowed to leave Allan Water alone.

The young man reached the lower floor before she could overtake him. There was something vigorous and protesting in the swing of his gray-clad shoulders. He went up to Doctor Buford, who had been walking up and down the hall, and she heard his crisp voice say :

"Doctor, Mr. Skipwith wants you and old Peter to sign a business document."

"I'll go call Peter," answered the doctor.

So she was right. It had been a message from Judge Henry, who was her father's partner in the mines.

Young Carr, still unnecessarily energetic, reached for his straw hat and was out upon the wistaria-hung porch before Ariadne could accost him.

At the sound of her light, pursuing feet he paused, turning. He did not smile even when, with extended hand, she said to him: "I am Ariadne. I want to thank you for coming."

He took her hand, bending on her a strangely troubled glance.

"Is father worse?" she asked quickly.

"No, the pain seems to have left him completely," he answered.

Her face brightened, but there was no response in his.

"Won't you — can't I get you some cake and wine?"

she asked a little timidly. She was not accustomed to doing the honors of the house.

"Thank you, no," he replied almost brusquely, "I'm just starting for the station."

"But you're not going to walk!" she protested, her hospitality again in arms. "The phaëton can be hitched up in a minute."

"I'd rather walk. There's a short cut somewhere, isn't there?"

"Yes, I'll show you — if you care to have me," said the girl. Again she felt rebuffed. Young Carr, with his hat still in his hand, drew aside into the swinging, purple flowers that she might precede him. She hurried down the shallow steps, wondering if all young men were as preoccupied and stern.

"It's over here — that little gate in the youpon hedge under the wild cherry tree," she said, first pointing, and then hurrying across the wide, irregular lawn. She glanced back over her shoulder to see if he were following.

The spring wind, fretting her blue skirts, gave them the air of a ruffled morning-glory.

Her companion made his way more slowly. His frowning eyes were on the moving earth, and his heels dug somewhat viciously into the silvery tufts of "rabbit-tobacco" which, with the tiny red explosions of "creep-in' Jesus," were the chief enemies of the legitimate grass.

"Hold on there a minute, please!" he cried, as the girl, having reached the gate, put a tentative hand to its latch. "My train isn't due yet. I just had to get away from that house. There is something I must say to you." He drew out his watch, a handsome gold one with chain attached. This had been his chief gift on his

twenty-first birthday — an event less recent than he would have cared just now to admit. He studied the timepiece gravely, as he had seen older men do.

"To me?" exclaimed Ariadne in astonishment. Then, as he said nothing, only continued his serious, thoughtful study of her upturned face, she added nervously: "If father is getting well, nothing about me can matter."

"It can, too. It matters a lot; I want to explain something — to — to —"

Now it was his turn for embarrassment. He looked from side to side, and chancing to note the tree near by, went up to it and leaned against the trunk. Unconsciously she followed and stood directly before him, questioning with wide, clear eyes.

"You see," he broke out rather unexpectedly, "we're sort of kin. Your cousin, Judge Henry, is my cousin twice removed — I've never taken time to work it out — but we are. All Virginians can find themselves related if they sit at it. Anyway, let's play we are; it makes things easier."

He raised a hopeful glance, but at her expression of bewilderment gave a little gesture of impatience, not at her but his own clumsy presentation of a subject he was now determined to pursue. He frowned more heavily, and taking from his pocket an old clasp-knife — a beloved and battered relic of his school-boy days — began tossing it up and down unopened.

"Your father sent for me, you know," he began, on a new tack.

"Yes, about some business papers, didn't he?"

"Then he told you!" the boy exclaimed, his eyes brightening.

"No, nobody told me; I just thought it," she an-

swered, and then regretted the words which clouded the first hint of radiance.

Young Carr drew a sigh of resignation. His frown, at least, was disappearing. He now looked directly into her eyes with his honest, hazel ones, and the expression of his lips relaxed.

Half-unconsciously, he opened a blade of the old knife and began clicking it with a sharp, metallic sound. He slouched more easily against the tree, drawing back one tan shoe to brace himself securely.

Ariadne watched him fascinated. In this quiet home few young people came into her life. Now, though she could not have said just why, the way in which he snapped the knife-blade seemed in her young eyes a very masculine, even a thrilling thing to do. There was something attractive, gallant, virile in the way his necktie hung, and in the soft, overleaning folds of his white silk shirt, delicately striped with blue.

When he spoke it was in a tone evidently chosen for the nature of his revelation.

"The fact is, Ariadne," he said, "I wasn't really sent for. Your father wanted Judge Henry. He had just left Culpeper on some other business, and since I'm his cub partner, I had to come in his place, though God knows I wish I hadn't."

The last words broke from the self-restraint and came with such vehemence that his listener was startled. She stared at him.

"I—I don't mean that as rudely as it sounds," he pleaded, "only I don't like having been the one to come. The truth is," he broke out again quite desperately, "I've just drawn up your father's will."

For a moment the girl could not speak. "Oh! You said he was better. This sounds worse than anything," she faltered.

"Not at all," he hastened to assure her. "That's because you are inexperienced. Every man should make a will — a decent will." He scowled, but at her puzzled look resumed the brisk manner. "This little spell has given your father a scare. He and his wife decided to have the thing drawn up at once. Your stepmother practically dictated it." Again the knife clicked fiercely.

"Why, I didn't know that Madonna understood wills."

The young lawyer gave an angry laugh. "She does — only too well. It's a beastly, rotten thing I've had to do, Ariadne. Judge Henry would never have been bullied into it. I tried to protest. Once I flung down the pen. Your father called me a damned impertinent young cub, and said I was there to write what I was told, and not to offer unsolicited advice." He clenched his fist at the thought. "So I went on. That's what it means to be a lawyer. I'd like to get a job as dog-catcher after this! Doctor Buford and old Peter witnessed it — without reading a line, of course. It's just this I want to talk about now. The whole thing is abominably unjust to you, Ariadne. It must never be probated." He wheeled around to the tree, and as an outlet for his excitement, made a long, diagonal cut in the silvery bark. A red wound grinned at him.

"I don't understand half of what you've said," came the girl's clear voice. "I don't want to understand. But nobody can make me believe that father is unjust. I am sorry he was rude. You must have done something very bad to make him speak that way."

"I didn't mean to criticize your father," protested the youth. "It's all your stepmother's doing."

"I love Donna, too," said the girl haughtily. "She's



the sweetest thing you ever saw to me. She says I'm like her own dear little sister."

"Her little grandmother!" ejaculated the young man.

Ariadne ignored him. "Things written by a lawyer don't count for much," she went on scornfully. "I had a long, long talk with father before you came. I have promised him if anything dreadful should ever happen, I will never, never leave Madonna. And you know I'll keep my promise."

"I can see that!" cried the other desperately. "But what you don't realize is the fact that you are letting yourself be bound tighter than any martyr to a stake. No, don't try to stop me; I must get this out. Your father's property is to be left entirely in her hands; and if those West Virginia mines keep on at the rate they are producing, he and his partner, Judge Henry, will be millionaires. Even if you get married, you are still bound to her. Every Virginia girl gets married. Your father started to make it so that if you gave her up for any cause whatsoever, you should lose all claim to his estate. That wasn't quite so bad. I began to write like the devil — I beg your pardon! — like mad, to get it in black and white; but Mrs. Skipwith broke in and said she'd rather have it dependent on your love and generosity; that if you ever gave her up, *she'd* be the one to lose everything. Oh, she was wise — the gay old bird! I'm just beginning to see how wise."

"Stop!" cried Ariadne, her face pale with anger. "You should not dare to say such things. But I am glad you did, for your own words show me how noble Donna is. She trusts me as my father trusts me. After this, do you suppose that anybody" — and her slow scornful glance seemed to add, "especially a slanderer like you" — "could turn me against my own people?"

Randolph was goaded into self-defense. "But you don't know," he began.

"As if I would!" continued Ariadne, with a withering glance. "Donna says that no man ever comprehends the beauty and self-sacrifice of a woman's nature. And now I can see for myself how true it is."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the badgered youth. He writhed under his sense of helplessness. Again the unoffending tree received a vicious thrust. The second-stroke, joining at the top with the first, made a red inverted "V."

Ariadne watched him for a moment, her small, dimpled chin in air. "I must say good-by now," she remarked. "Father may be needing me." The morning-glory twirled, feeling a new indignation that the outstretched hand of courtesy had been ignored.

"Please don't leave like this!" Randolph entreated. "I'll be good; I swear I will. After all, you oughtn't to be so hard on a fellow that only wants to be your friend. If you go now, it shows that you hate me. I don't want you to hate me, Ariadne. I've been horribly rough and stupid and hot-tempered, but it's all for you. We're sort of cousins, you know."

The girl had paused. Randolph, watching under his lashes, drew a breath of relief, for he saw her tense, young figure relax and the spirited head droop just a little.

The young man cautiously pursued his advantage. "I never meant to hurt or anger you — cross my heart, I didn't! Please say that you forgive me."

The bright head went lower. She shot a little side-wise look of hesitating friendliness.

"I'm sure it was those horrid, legal terms that sounded the worse. For a moment I forgot that you could not possibly understand them; you're only a kid."

"I'm not a kid!" she cried, her former indignation returning at the new affront. "I'm fifteen years old this very day!"

"Oh, then, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed the boy, trying hard not to laugh. "That's awful old, of course." He fingered his watch-chain meaningly; but the significant gesture was lost.

"Mammy made me a birthday cake this big around," she went on, determined to overwhelm him. With her slim, outstretched arms she encircled an imaginary and gigantic cake. "There are fifteen candles on it, all pink. Cousin Nellie brought them over from Culpeper, and a whole box of the loveliest hair ribbons. Donna gave me this little turquoise ring with a heart on it; she says it is her heart."

For an instant the tall figure of the boy bent over her outstretched hand. The tawdry little jewel looked like Donna.

"We haven't even thought about cutting the cake," the girl went on in a saddened voice.

"Fifteen to-day — the twenty-second of the month of May. I mustn't forget it, since we are to be good friends. And you are a big child for your age, too," he said condescendingly, wishing to tease her, longing at any price to win the smiles back to her face. "I shouldn't be surprised if you were nearly up to my shoulder."

His ruse succeeded.

"Up to your shoulder — the idea!" she cried. "I'm to your ear at least!"

He laughed, straightening himself against the tree. With pretty eagerness she ran up to him, drawing herself up to full height at his side. Strands of bright hair blew out in a little gale across his coat. He looked down with eyes that twinkled.

"I could eat soup off of it," he said loftily.

"I don't believe it; you cheated! You were on tip-toe," she protested, breaking away from him, and putting her hand to a cheek that tingled strangely. Her father's coat had never felt like that!

"Oh, I say!" the young man exclaimed, with the ardor of discovery. "You've got the prettiest hair I ever saw! If spiders could spin gold, I'd think about a million of them had got busy with your head over night."

Before this naïve admiration, Ariadne's last defense went down.

"It — it isn't pretty at all," she stammered, while a crimson tide of pleasure surged up into her face. "You're only making fun."

"I am not; I mean it. You know I do. Oh, please!" he cried, springing forward as he saw her turn. "Don't run away. I won't say it any more. There's something else I want to ask you."

She paused, her back to him, her chin, smooth and firm and pink as a just ripened nectarine, tilted high. This she now turned in profile over her shoulder, and he saw that her lips were quivering with suppressed laughter. There was a nervous little dimple at the corner nearest him.

"Not another word about your bein' pretty, I'll swear it," he began to plead. "I won't even mention your dimple — honest I won't. Being your cousin, I have a right to inquire into your affairs. Now, be a good child, come to Cousin Randy, and tell him what you do with yourself in that big house all day?" He nodded toward the solemn mansion.

"You're not my cousin Randy; you are just a big boy trying to tease," she protested. Nevertheless, she moved back toward the tree.

"You haven't answered me. How do you get through all the time down here?"

"Why, I never thought. We don't do very much. I'm out in the garden and woods a lot. When I'm indoors — why, now that Madonna has come, we just read and talk and sew a little, and just walk around."

"But surely you must go to some sort of school," he said a little patronizingly.

"There isn't any school to go to," she replied. "Up till a few months ago I had a sort of governess, a teacher that lived here with Grandma and me."

"An impecunious relation, or I'll eat my hat!" he put in, laughing.

"Yes, it was," she admitted. "Father never thought she knew enough to teach, but Grandina said what did that matter — she was a Winston of Winchester and needed our assistance."

"That's Virginia in a nutshell," cried the boy, straightening himself for an oratorical gesture. "Your education didn't count! It was the old dead-loss of a relative that must be thought of. Well, I want to go to a place where there are no relatives either to boost you or to pull you down. I want to be what I can make of myself."

Ariadne could scarcely hold back her laughter. Such vehemence, such sweeping gestures in that quiet spot seemed so incongruous. Yet there was a something in his voice that stirred her.

"You've decided to be a lawyer like Cousin Judge, when you grow up, haven't you?"

The question brought him down to common earth. For an instant his dark eyes flashed. "When he grew up" indeed! He gave a sound indicative of derision and then, seeing that the girl's face sparkled with a thousand gleams of laughter, threw back his head and joined her.

"That's one on me for calling you a kid," he said good-naturedly. "Yes, I am going to be a lawyer; in fact, the Virginia Bar considers me one already."

"Not just like the Judge, I reckon," he went on in a more chastened manner. "That's rather a large order. He's a big man, Judge Henry is. Why, I don't believe that all the money in the world would make him take on a case that he didn't know was straight — or write a document — a will, for instance — that he thought unjust to anybody." His face clouded suddenly, and he turned, making a thrust at an unoffending green lizard now turning from green to silver against the cherry bark.

Ariadne held her breath until she saw the intended victim leap back unharmed into the hedge, and then she asked: "Do lawyers get money for doing such things?"

"Great heavens!" said Randy, staring in wonder at such primitive ignorance, "do they get money? That's all that most of them care about. What do you expect them to live on?"

"I don't — that is — I didn't know," she faltered. "Now you are making fun again; it's in your eyes."

"Your question rather knocked my wind out, I'll admit. I've got to earn my living through the Law — as much as Mr. Crane earns his in being station-master. My one doubt is whether I can. The fact is, Ariadne, I've made up my mind to leave Virginia."

"Leave Virginia!" she echoed. Her voice rang with incredulity. It was as if he had said "leave Paradise."

"Yes, I do," he repeated shamelessly. "What's the use of practicing law in Culpeper? Nothing ever happens there but niggers shooting craps or being run in for 'fragrancy' — which is what they call 'vagrancy.'"

And besides, if I ever do get a real case, everybody there is more or less kin to me, and I couldn't charge them anything."

"Of course not," said the girl hastily. "But it's awful to think of going away from your own home — and your people — and — everybody."

"It won't be a picnic," admitted the youth soberly. "But the very loneliness will make a fellow work hard. Judge Henry and his wife know how I feel, and they are with me. By the way," he added, before the girl could speak, "isn't your Cousin Nellie a trump?"

"Oh, isn't she?" responded his companion, clasping her hands with charming eagerness. "Everybody loves Cousin Nellie — and little Dick Carter!" She drew a long breath, as if Dick Carter's charms were beyond the power of speech.

Randy laughed. "That kid's a terror, a perfect terror. I've had to take to going to my office by a back street. He got to watching for me and yelling out 'Wandy! Wandy!' until the Fire Brigade used to come."

"Now wasn't that precious!" cried the girl, her eyes shining. "You gave him a little tortoise once, didn't you?"

"I did," admitted Randolph darkly. "That was the beginning of his onslaughts. How did you know?"

"He brought it over here with him," she began. And then, with many interruptions of young laughter, she told him the history of the turtle's dreadful day. In finishing, she added: "The poor little thing is around here somewhere now, that is, if he managed to live after the buttermilk. Cousin Nellie said she wouldn't have it tortured any more, so Anguish and I washed it under the pump and turned it loose among the bushes."

She stooped over, peering among the thick stems of the hedge as if hoping for a miraculous appearance.

Watching her, Randy thought that any beast with eyes and ears might well be lured. She was prettier now than any girl in Culpeper, and he was just planning a crafty scheme by which Cousin Nellie should get Ariadne over there for a long visit, when the girl stood upright, and making a forlorn and most entrancing little grimace, said plaintively: "It isn't there."

"Of course it isn't, goose!" he answered. The words were not chivalrous, but he had suddenly dropped the knife and now had her two hands in his. He bent down that his eyes might look straight into her own. She gave a tiny gasp and then stood very still. It was in his lean, boyish face that the blood now surged.

"Remember I'm your friend, your best friend, Ariadne; a fellow that wants you to give him a chance of undoing a beastly thing he was forced into — something he feels unfair to you. I am your best friend; say it, Ariadne!"

"Ye-es," she answered, shrinking a little from the eager brightness of his eyes. "After father and grandma and Donna and Cousin Nellie Henry —"

"Never mind about calling out the entire population," he laughed, though with the underlying note of earnestness. "Outside of that bunch, then, I am your very dearest friend in all the world?"

She nodded.

He gave her a long, remembering look, and then, freeing her hands, began a search through various pockets. "I wish I had known about your birthday," he said in a regretful tone. "I'd have brought you a present, sure. I wonder if I've got anything about me that would do?" He drew out a crumpled handkerchief,



some letters, a small packet of beer-tickets which he hastily concealed, a box of cigarettes and some matches, a leather pocketbook which seemed to have been dieting, his return railway ticket, and after that only a button and a few loose coins.

"Not much in exhibit 'A,'" he said ruefully. "If I even had my scarf-pin on! We ought to have something, if only as a reminder."

"I shan't need a reminder, Randy," said the low, sweet voice. The unfamiliar name was whispered with exquisite shyness.

He flashed a look of quick gratitude. "Now you've simply got to have a fairing!" he said. "Here's a coin — rather a bright one; suppose we divide it?"

As she did not answer, being in fact ignorant of what he meant, he went on apologetically: "Of course, it's an awful chestnut. Everybody does it in novels and on the stage, but we shall make it real. Now to get the darned thing broken!"

He put it between his strong, white teeth, at which Ariadne gave a protesting cry. Next, and with great effort, he bent it slightly between his fingers. "No good that," he murmured. Then, stooping for the knife, he thrust the small piece of silver into an open groove, and began twisting vigorously. "This does the trick," he announced joyously. "I thought it would. Only I don't want the edges to be left too straight. You know, they ought to wriggle, so that when the time comes for us to fit them together, there can't be any mistake."

"I see now what you mean!" cried Ariadne, thrilling at the romance of the situation. "Why, I've never even heard of breaking a coin before!"

"So much the better," remarked this incipient Chief Justice.

The girl watched every movement with breathless interest. How strong Randy was! How sure of himself! How determined to have things yield to his wishes! Even her father, who until this moment had been her one idea of manly strength and excellence, seemed just a little deliberate and worn beside this ardent spirit.

"There!" exclaimed Randy, holding a half of the coin up in either hand. "It's got a bully edge. Looks like a camel bit it. Now you're to keep your piece, and I'll keep mine, and no matter how many years off it may be, or what distance is between us, just send me this, and I will come to you. Will you promise to remember?"

He handed her one half with solemn courtesy.

"Oh, yes," declared the girl, taking it and then looking up with earnest eyes. "How wonderful you are! I'm very glad you want to be my friend."

Randy, incredibly pleased, yet at the same time more incredibly embarrassed, turned for refuge to the mutilated tree.

"Why, here's something else I can do!" he cried joyously, "I've almost made an A without knowing it. I'll finish up and carve the date in after. The tree will keep it for us."

"Poor tree!" sighed Ariadne. "Look how you have made it bleed already."

"It ought to be proud of the chance to bleed for such a cause," said Randolph gallantly. "Yours is the loveliest name I know!"

"Oh! But your own hands are red with it."

"That shows I am branded forever as your knight."

"Listen!" the girl said, throwing her head back like a deer. "Isn't that the train?"

Randolph, too, listened. A faint hooting came from distant hills.

"Jimmininy, it is! It's climbing Wolf Ridge now. It's me for a sprint."

"I'm sorry, but good-by."

She laid her hand in his, but for some absurd reason could not force her eyes to meet his own.

As he hurried through the gate she ran to it, and waving, called once more: "Good-by, Sir Knight of the Cherry Tree."

He turned among the sumach bushes. His eyes gleamed like the brown creek of Allan Water over its golden sands.

He bowed in exaggerated courtesy, making at the same time a wide, sweeping gesture with his hat.

Ariadne felt the swish of the long white plume.

"Good-by, fair lady, my Ariadne of Allan Water!"

## CHAPTER V

ARIADNE danced back across the lawn. The air held strange sparkles; she was sure now that things were coming right. She looked up at the closed blinds of her father's room, almost believing, in this new rush of hope, that his dear face would smile down upon her.

The shutters of one of the windows were suddenly thrown back, the head of Doctor Buford, a silver sphere in the white, afternoon light, showed for a moment and vanished. There was nothing to excite alarm; the old man had been swift and unnecessarily direct, it is true, but there might be a dozen reasons for his celerity. The girl listened keenly. No sound came from the room, but far off, apparently in the valley, something again hooted, and gave a long, derisive wail ending in a shriek. It was only Randy's train slipping down the nearer incline of Wolf Ridge, but in that arrested silence it seemed the triumphant cry of an approaching fury. Ariadne's feet froze to the damp earth beneath them. Her mood of joy became a shattered vacuum, into which rushed all her past terrors with a legion in pursuit. Her sky darkened, and a thousand bat-winged fears beat in her face. She struggled to move; the numbness of her feet spread upward. Now she cried aloud, stretching her arms toward her father. As if her voice had cut the terrifying, unseen hindrance, she gave a leap forward and ran toward the house.

The lower floor was empty and suffocatingly still. She paused at the foot of the stair. Footsteps hurried

above her. For an instant she clung, half-fainting, to the newel-post, and then, under a new spur of premonition, began a frantic ascent.

Before she could reach the top, a dreadful scream seemed to slit through the very tissue of her soul.

"Donna!" she answered. Then, with a cry almost as terrible, "Ma-donna!"

The days that followed were like some endless, midnight storm, pierced by the sudden lightning of a woman's desperate cries. For Donna was a creature gone mad with hysterical grief.

Ariadne moved through the blackness, her childish hands outspread, groping always for that other one who needed her. She slept with Madonna now, and often, when the slight, cowering form had sobbed itself into exhaustion, the girl lay awake, staring upward, and wondering how it was possible for the two to endure such suffering and remain alive.

Somewhere through the dark the dear old grandmother had found them, taking up in pitying silence a routine of existence she had thought forever forfeited. Judge Henry and Cousin Nellie also came and went, and once young Randy Carr. But this time Ariadne did not see him. He sent a great cluster of old-fashioned, white moss-roses to her room, knowing their inevitable destination. The girl's tears fell on his flowers. Grandma was asked to voice her thanks.

In spite of his sincere liking for the girl, he was intensely relieved when she excused herself. He was there to fight her battles, arguing strongly with Judge Henry against the probation of Mr. Skipwith's will, and he knew that he could have no opponent more vehement than the girl herself.

Mrs. Skipwith remained apathetic and indifferent. When forced into expression, she would weep quietly and repeat :

"Ariadne and I want things as her father wished them."

The burden of this decision lay heavily upon Judge Henry. He recognized to the full what injustice the legal clinching of this bond would mean to Ariadne, and yet, on the other hand, as he stated to his indignant and bellicose young "cub," with such a girl the official document meant nothing. "If we, for her sake, attack my poor friend's will, we merely cast dishonor upon one who can no longer protect himself, and as far as the spirit of his wishes is concerned, alter nothing. It is her spoken promise that binds Ariadne, and that no legal process can withdraw."

So at last the document was filed. Mrs. Skipwith became sole beneficiary of her husband's rapidly-increasing interests. To Ariadne these worldly considerations were less than the dead autumn leaves that now began to drift across her father's grave.

Randy Carr came no more to Allan Water, and no one either missed or spoke of him. Cousin Nellie was, as ever, their most cherished visitor. Both she and Mrs. Bannister were now very kind to the widowed bride. Even their indignation when the will was read, and their suspicion that it was all "Donna Mayrant's doings," could not permanently alienate their sympathies.

"The poor soul's grief is genuine," old Mrs. Bannister had said one day, as Mrs. Skipwith in her vague, irresolute way had risen, moved aimlessly about and then vanished. "She has received a mortal blow."

Because she was young and normal and lived much in the open air, Ariadne slowly, and with bitter, inward

upbraiding, realized that she was lifting her storm-beaten head to the sun; that her young heart was still open to the beauty of the changing seasons; that even at careless, unguarded moments she could laugh.

Such lapses were invariably followed by hours of repentant weeping. She tried to scourge herself back to her first despair and looked with humility and something approaching worship to the white, unchanging mask of grief that Donna wore.

There had never been a lovelier autumn: the gold and scarlet and russet tones of the trees sang, as it were, an orchestrated triumph of color. The dark fringed gentians, lifting blue eyes among the yellowing ferns, surprised Ariadne with joy. The sudden flicker of a scarlet tanager was a little torch that she would not have dared to hold against her heart.

But Donna practically never left the house. Most of her time was spent in the room where her husband had died. This was her special shrine. Photographs of Mr. Skipwith, beginning from his very infancy, were set about in silver frames. An enlarged portrait hung at the foot of the bed, swathed in crape. The little woman grew thinner and developed a cough which she refused to treat or to have Doctor Buford advise upon.

Mrs. Bannister became seriously alarmed. As in all such emergencies she wrote to Cousin Nellie, receiving promptly the setting of a "day."

Ariadne was, naturally, even more anxious than Mrs. Bannister concerning her stepmother's health, and in driving Cousin Nellie from the station talked of little else.

"Well, my dear, I am glad to see you," the old lady cried, in welcoming her. "Somehow, the very sight of you brings energy."

"You'll think so to-day, I'm sure, when you hear what I've been planning," retorted Mrs. Henry, with a wrinkle of mischief. "Where is Donna?"

Mrs. Bannister sighed, and her gentle smile fled.

"Up-stairs as usual, rearranging flowers before all those photographs of poor Ransome. She begins to make a fetish of her grief."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Ariadne, as the two ladies moved toward the living-room.

"Yes, come along," said Cousin Nellie, reaching around and drawing the girl's hand through her arm.

Again she laughed mischievously. "Grandma's a little afraid when I begin to talk plans," she confided to the girl in a stage whisper.

"You do sometimes appear to old-fashioned eyes a little impulsive, Nellie dear," deprecated the old lady with a faint, backward smile.

"This time it isn't impulse," averred Mrs. Henry, when at last the three were seated and both doors closed. "I've been thinking about it for weeks, and have talked over every point with Judge Henry. It's a matter of plain common sense."

"Out with it, then," encouraged Mrs. Bannister, feigning a lightness that she did not feel.

"It's more for our girl here than for the wretched little creature up-stairs," fenced Cousin Nellie, smiling affectionately on Ariadne. "But Judge Henry and I have come to the conclusion that the two simply must be taken away from Allan Water." At the shocked simultaneous looks, she amended hastily: "Not for good and all, of course. Just for a visit: to keep Donna from rooting herself like a mandrake."

"On a visit," murmured the old lady, when her breath came back.



"We have consulted Doctor Buford, too. He says it is absolutely necessary for Mrs. Skipwith to have a change. If she doesn't" — in the pause she gathered her full meed of horrified attention — "he will not answer for the consequences."

"Oh, Cousin Nellie! I'm sure I can persuade her. She'll do almost anything for me!" cried Ariadne, springing to her feet. She was for darting up the stairs at once and bearing her charge off in her strong young arms.

"Stop — stop, my dear," quavered the grandmother. "Hand me my salts; I am quite overcome. We must think first where you are going. Was it Culpeper you had in mind, dear Nellie?"

"Culpeper! No! That would only be a smaller puddle in the Slough of Despond. They want to break away entirely: new scenes, new influences, no familiar perches for the widow-bird to sit on. Judge Henry and I want them to go with us next week to New York."

Again old Mrs. Bannister was speechless. Ariadne fell back into her chair, but the name had already begun its magic work.

"We can find them some quiet, homelike lodgings," continued Mrs. Henry. "And I think they had better stay there until very nearly Christmas. Of course, they would want to be back in Virginia then."

"You do make things seem unstable," murmured Mrs. Bannister. "I can see that the move may have advantages, but it appears to me a very grave responsibility to assume."

"That may be," admitted Cousin Nellie, "but it isn't good for Ariadne to be always with that human watering-pot."

"I'm not sure Donna will go so far, even with me,"

Ariadne hesitated, her troubled, young eyes turning to the speaker.

"She's sure to object at first, but it will be as futile as the kicks of a rabbit when you hold it by the ears. If the rest of us decide upon it, she'll go."

"But — but — what would become of me, alone in this big house?" asked Mrs. Bannister, in a plaintive voice.

"If you don't want to come back to us at Culpeper — and I know you don't — oh, my feelings are not hurt in the least," she laughed, as Mrs. Bannister made a gesture of protest and murmured "My dear!" "It's like living in a monkey cage, when Dick Kyarter and his friends are on the war path. You are better off and happier here. Do you remember Cousin Agnes Hill?" she questioned, with apparent irrelevance.

"Certainly! We were girls together at the White Sulphur Springs. Agnes Yarrow was quite a belle." The old lady tossed her head at the memory. She could well afford generous tribute to Agnes, for it was well known that she herself, in that far-off season, had been the toast and beauty of the countryside.

"It's hard to believe when you look at her now; that school-marm daughter-in-law dragged her through the briars backward, or so people say. Of course Cousin Agnes never mentions it. She's too much of a lady."

"Naturally," said Mrs. Bannister.

"Now no one has to be told that you were a beauty, Cousin Belinda," the flatterer went on, with a naughty little wink at Ariadne. "You are a beauty still. Why, old Colonel Randolph says you broke enough hearts to pave the streets of Culpeper."

"Nonsense, my dear!" laughed the old lady, a slow

pink flush making her face charming. "An aged woman like me, who has long since put by all vanities! But tell me more of Agnes Yarrow."

"That son in Chicago with whom she lived finally died. He never amounted to much, at best. There was a small life insurance to be divided between his widow and his mother. The wife took up her old work of teaching school, and Cousin Agnes, after all these years, is back home in the South. It is perfectly pathetic to see her joy in it! There really is no permanent place for her, poor dear. We have all had her for little visits, but that isn't like a home. It would be an act of charity for you to invite her to spend the winter at Allan Water. Well, what do you think of it?"

She leaned forward, watching the changing expression in the elder face.

"I've never been very closely associated with Agnes, in spite of our kinship," Mrs. Bannister said doubtfully. "She was rather a — a — frivolous young person, as I remember."

"She got over that during the last century. Now she's meeker than Moses. You see, we've had her at the house, and I have been sizing the dear old soul up just for this purpose. She plays checkers and bezique as well as you do — perhaps even better."

Mrs. Bannister raised her eyebrows, at which the feminine Machiavelli before her had to stoop for a handkerchief that had not fallen, in order to conceal a disrespectful grin, and Ariadne suddenly rose and went to a window.

"That is as may be," said the old lady stiffly. "But what is far more important — is she a reverent woman, Nellie? After all these years in the north and west does she still read her Bible?"

"Night and morning. She would as soon go to bed without washing her face."

Mrs. Bannister could not conceal her satisfaction.

"It would seem quite a providential arrangement," she conceded.

"There is one favor she would ask — only one," said Mrs. Henry quickly.

The elder lady grew alert.

"A favor? Of what nature, my dear?"

Ariadne turned a little anxiously.

"I told her that you didn't like animals very much, especially dogs. Neither does she, with the exception of an old cat to which she is devoted. She calls him 'Doctor Johnson.' She wouldn't be willing to go anywhere without her cat."

Ariadne, remembering a long succession of banished kittens, held her breath for the next words. Perplexity struggled plainly on the old lady's visage. Of course, cats did not go mad or bite, and there were no sleeping infants near whose innocent breath could be sucked, yet to harbor for an indefinite visit an unknown quadruped!

"What a nice, dignified name — Doctor Johnson," the girl remarked, as if to the window, while Cousin Nellie, with a cunning less obvious, murmured: "Remember what trials the poor soul has had. It's pitiful to think she has had to concentrate her love upon a tom-cat."

The elder lady was won; the conspirators exchanged triumphant glances. But in capitulating, Mrs. Bannister had a doubt still to be solved. She looked toward Mrs. Henry earnestly and asked: "Is Doctor Johnson a well-mannered cat?"

While the laughter following Cousin Nellie's affirmative

still echoed, Donna came into the room, shrinking a little as she heard the sounds of mirth and caught sight of Mrs. Henry's glowing countenance.

The New York project was laid before her to be met at first by the prophesied demurs.

"But *I* want to go, Donna," urged her stepdaughter, not realizing the full intent of truth in her statement. "I have never seen New York. I want you to take me there."

"I suppose it doesn't matter where I really am," said the widow at last. "My heart will always be in Ransome's grave."

Mrs. Henry squirmed suddenly then told herself not to be a fool.

"So it's all settled!" she cried in her brisk, practical voice. "Have your trunks at the station next Tuesday at eleven. Judge Henry and I will pick you up on our way from Culpeper. Ariadne can play with Dick Kyarter on the trip."

"Oh, I shall like that!" said the girl.

"You'll get an overdose by the end of the first hour," said Mrs. Henry. "But we'll have the drawing-room and can lock him in when he becomes too awful. Now, Donna," she said, turning directly to the little widow, "you won't back out? I can count on you for next Tuesday?"

"I only live for Ariadne," said Donna. "It shall be as she wishes."

"I will stay on in New York until I can see you comfortably settled; and the minute I come home, I'll run over here for the day, Cousin Belinda, and tell you all about them. Now, what do you say to a nice game of four-handed bezique?"

In contrast to the long series of empty days which had

preceded it, the little flurry of preparation for the Northern trip seemed an orgy of excitement.

Whenever she felt herself becoming too much interested, the widow counteracted the fancied disloyalty by a pilgrimage to her husband's grave. But the packing went on, and though on the appointed morning both Donna and Ariadne were in tears, the station was reached in good time. Once in the train, with Dick Carter falling from all the seats in turn, sentimental regrets had no place in which to flourish.

Cousin Agnes, "Doctor Johnson," and one modest, oilcloth trunk had made their appearance at Allan Water the day before.

The two old ladies settled down at once into a reëstablished friendship and a new association that was to last for the rest of their gentle lives.

Ariadne's first letter was short and rather full of the bewilderment caused by this sudden advent into the great city. Mrs. Skipwith did not write; this was no surprise to Mrs. Bannister, but when two weeks passed and there was no word from Nellie Henry, she began to feel some uneasiness. In a postscript to the girl's latest letter were the words:

"We are just home from a *matinée*. Madonna feels that it is doing her good to go to places."

"A *matinée*!" repeated the old lady, as she read the letter to her receptive companion. "Surely, Agnes, that means something at a playhouse!"

"It does," said Cousin Agnes. "It is a theater in the middle of the day."

Mrs. Bannister frowned.

"It does not seem possible that a woman scarcely six months widowed would go to a play."

"Anything is possible in New York or Chicago," said

Mrs. Hill, with a reminiscent sigh. "They are not Virginia."

"I shall be most anxious until Nellie Henry comes," frowned Mrs. Bannister, compressing her lips.

A few days later a very brief note from Culpeper stated the fact that Mrs. Henry had arrived and would "be over" at the first possible moment. Apparently the moment found obstacles in the way, and it was fully a week before Mrs. Bannister was asked to have Anguish and the phaëton in readiness to meet a particular train.

Mrs. Henry arrived, basket-less, Dick Carter-less, and clothed in garments of a somber gray. Her cheeks were less rosy than usual, and her pleasant voice had a chastened tone. In fact, there was about her an air of humility so unusual and yet so unmistakable that both old ladies felt in advance a touch of apprehension that her first words changed to alarm.

"I might as well come out with it: I've been a fool!" said Nellie Henry, sinking to the corner of the sofa and looking as if it were a dentist's chair. "You are right, Cousin Belinda. I do plunge into other people's affairs too recklessly."

"But what has happened, dear Nellie?" besought Mrs. Bannister. "Don't keep me in suspense. Is Ariadne—?"

"Nothing has happened yet. Ariadne's all right," said Mrs. Henry. "It's the other one, and what may happen in the future! Could I have a glass of your black-berry cordial, Cousin Belinda? I need it."

Mrs. Bannister rose hurriedly and touched the bell. Her face expressed merely a troubled questioning. Cousin Agnes, having served her turn in the great world, felt by instinct what was coming.

"That wretched little Donna," cried the visitor, when

a glass of the rich, spicy wine had been drunk, "has already begun to paint and blondine her hair again."

"No!" gasped Mrs. Bannister.

"It is the truth! And that is not the worst. Far from moving into the quiet house I found for her, she has taken, by the month, one of the best suites at the Quaza. She says she likes it, and that it cheers her up."

"Cheers her up!" reiterated the speaker, echoing her own words with scornful bitterness, for by this time her listeners were incapable of anything but gasps and ejaculations. "I should think it might, to the tune of hundreds of dollars a week!"

Mrs. Bannister's eyes seemed to glaze. She fell back in an attitude of exhaustion.

"That's nothing for a fashionable hotel," piped Cousin Agnes, "and of course that means the apartments only, no food at all."

Mrs. Henry nodded. "But that is not the worst yet," she continued. "She has begun to make eyes at men again!"

At this a hollow silence grew; the old lady gave a sort of shudder and then became rigid. It is to be feared that Cousin Agnes was enjoying herself.

"She has begun to dress the part, and when I left was prancing up and down Fifth Avenue with gardenias pinned to her bodice; looking out sidewise from under a new widow's bonnet that cost just eighty dollars. And there is a man, a sleek, treacherous, foreign-looking creature, young enough to be her son, who is following her about."

Mrs. Bannister revived with a shock.

"Ariadne must be sent for at once, at once. My granddaughter cannot be allowed to remain in such surroundings."



"That's the real tragedy," commiserated Cousin Nellie. "Ariadne is bound to her stepmother, hand and foot. She begins to see now what the probating of that dreadful will is going to mean for her."

"But surely," argued the old lady feverishly, "Ransome had no thought of such a thing as this. He would be the first to wish Ariadne removed."

"In law there are no provisions for 'might-have-beens,'" said Mrs. Henry. "I know enough about it for that. All of you, with Judge Henry leading, insisted on accepting the will. Randy Carr and I were the only ones with common sense. Now it's too late to interfere. Ariadne is chained like a prisoner to a cart. No matter if that silly woman Donna married again, Ariadne is still her slave. Oh, where I blame myself," she broke out passionately, "is for not seeing what is now so odiously clear: that it was inevitable for some adventurer to marry Ransome's widow for her money. She is too easy a victim to escape."

"That man who you say is following her, is he good-looking?" asked Cousin Agnes a little timidly. She feared the fire in Cousin Belinda's eyes, and yet the subject had a fascination. Cousin Agnes still read novels.

"Yes, he is," admitted Mrs. Henry with angry emphasis. "In his own repulsive way he is one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen. His face is almost perfect, the dark, sleepy type that schoolgirls and old fools like Donna Mayrant go wild about. The very sound of his creamy voice infuriates me. Oh, he'll get Donna's money if he decides that she has enough to make it worth his while."

The old lady vibrated with indignation.

"I can scarcely believe that it is I, Belinda Bannister, who sit here listening to such unspeakable possibilities.

That Mayrant woman must not be allowed to marry again."

Mrs. Henry shrugged. "Who is going to prevent it?" she asked.

"Yes — who?" murmured Cousin Agnes. She stooped down to lift Doctor Johnson, who was purring about her knees. Mrs. Bannister's haggard, restless eyes unconsciously fixed upon the cat. Unmoved and careless of the turmoil all about him, the large, slow creature turned in his mistress' lap, revolving majestically as to the sound of a fluted minuet unheard by grosser human ears, gave now a dainty pat, and then a tentative clutch, under which the meager limbs of Cousin Agnes flinched, and finally, having trodden the full measure of his mystic convolutions, settled all at once into a sleeping, furry ball of indifference.

After an interval Mrs. Bannister remarked in a quieter voice: "Even if there is nothing to be done just now, Christmas is not so far off. Ariadne will insist upon coming home for that date, I know. Perhaps we can then regain some influence over this woman — who — who —" Words failed her. She drew a long sigh and then looked somewhat wistfully from one to the other of her companions.

Early in December Mrs. Bannister wrote a personal letter to Mrs. Skipwith, entreating her to return to Allan Water for Christmas. The reply was from Ariadne, a suppressed, pathetic little letter, written evidently in a mood of intense homesickness, and saying that Donna thought it would be bad for both of them to come back to a place so full of sad memories.

Only a few weeks later the blow fell. "Donna is to marry Mr. Martel in a few days," Ariadne wrote. After a honeymoon of two weeks, they were going abroad and

insisted that Ariadne go with them. In the interval she was to return for a brief visit home.

When the girl arrived she seemed in a sort of daze. Her reluctance to discuss her stepmother's affairs was obvious. To Mrs. Bannister's many anxious questions she replied as briefly as possible.

"Yes, Mr. Martel was kind to her. He treated her like a very little girl and wanted her to stop wearing black dresses. She had been compelled to refuse this. He was always very polite, though."

When the old lady attempted to force an opinion of the marriage, the girl hung her head, and as though in personal shame, murmured :

"I cannot understand it at all, Grandma. They say it is because I am a child yet. Oh, I don't want to talk about it !"

When at last the summons came calling Ariadne to join her stepmother in New York, all the suppressed bitterness in old Mrs. Bannister's heart found voice :

"It is impossible for you to throw in your young, unspotted life with such people, Ariadne. Your father himself, were he alive, would forbid it. There is no one who will blame you. In his name as well as my own I authorize you to refuse to go with them."

"I must go, Grandma, I must," the girl insisted hopelessly.

"There is no must about it. You are a child and should be protected from yourself. You cannot be dragged around Europe by an adventurer like that man Martel and the woman who has bought him."

"I was more of a child when father asked me for my promise," she asserted.

The old lady struck her hands together.

"Your father must have been in delirium. If he could

have dreamed what awful consequences were to follow, he would have bitten his tongue out first."

"He asked me never to leave Madonna."

"She doesn't need you now. The creature may not even want you. She has lost her head completely over that low man."

"She says she wants me," the girl protested. "And if I leave her, she loses all the money."

"She has a husband — such as he is."

"But he hasn't any money, either. Donna told me so."

"And you — a Skipwith of Virginia — you must go about with such outcasts, so that they may spend your father's wealth. It is intolerable!"

Ariadne answered nothing. Her small, white face showed the dumb suffering of her heart.

"I can't endure it; I can't endure it, Ariadne!" cried the old lady, her voice suddenly breaking with sobs. "You are all I have in the world. I would rather — almost — see you lying there in the hillside, safe, by your young mother's side."

"I would rather be dead, too," sobbed Ariadne, flinging her arms around her grandmother and giving way at last to her own tears. "I don't want to leave you. Somehow, I am afraid of Mr. Martel. I don't believe he loves Donna as she loves him. I don't understand things, I know, but somehow I feel that Donna needs me more than ever."

"Is there nothing — nothing — to be done?" the old lady wailed; but the hopelessness of her own voice answered her.

"Maybe they won't stay in Europe very long," said Ariadne, when her hysterical sobs had been quieted. "Donna says they will never live here. He hates the

country. If they are in New York I can be at home lots. Don't cry any more, Grandma. It hurts me so to see you cry. We'll just keep on hoping that they will get tired of Europe and come back."

"Heaven grant it," said the old lady, wiping her eyes and feeling just a little comforted. "For the rest, you can only bear in mind that you are a child of gentle birth, and that no external defilement can really sully a heart that is in itself fine and pure. Promise me, my child, that you will read a chapter of your Bible every night."

"Oh, Grandma, you know I will!"

"And that you will never fail to say your prayers, my darling!"

"As if I could," cried Ariadne, smiling through her tears. "I don't believe I'd sleep a wink."

"I, too, shall pray, with all the strength that is in me, for our Heavenly Father to have you in His keeping," faltered the old lady, beginning to weep again.

"Then nothing can hurt me," whispered the girl just a little shyly, for these were things of which she had never spoken. "And my dear father who was here on earth, maybe he will know that I am keeping my promise and be glad."

## BOOK TWO

### CHAPTER I

THE month of May, which in Ariadne's secluded and fanciful childhood had seemed a miracle wrought for Allan Water and herself alone, had trailed its fragrant, flower-embroidered scarf through many alien lands.

The girl had learned, in these years of wandering, that spring brought a universal ecstasy. Yet, since it was her birth month, there was still in her heart a conscious, personal singling of it out from all other seasons. The fiber of her thoughts grew, as it were, more sensitive. Her eyes saw beauty clearer; but though best-loved, it always brought, with heightened poignancy, the yearning for her far-distant home.

Roses breathed a common language; the upturned faces of children, whether they were plucking green iris from Italian hills or dusty dandelions from arid, Spanish soil, answered her smile with the same shy friendliness. The round world was more beautiful than she had ever dreamed. Yet, with increasing frequency of late, her very soul grew sick, as at this moment, for the sight of white clouds drifting above her own homeland, for the sound of mocking-birds and the scarlet tanager among familiar junipers. She longed, almost with physical anguish, to fling herself upon the sanded paths of Allan Water, and hear her own voice sobbing, "I am at home, at last!"

Now May was here again. She sat alone upon a tiny, iron-fenced balcony, staring out on a scene so utterly unlike Virginia that it was hard to believe it part of the same green world.

This, the seventh of May, had been an unusually warm and beautiful day. Across Dutch meadows, gilded with a rime of close-set buttercups, the spring wind blew with a gentleness it might have borrowed from those distant American hills. The great, round sun which had risen gloriously now sank to a still more radiant retreat.

Less than a week before they had reached the endearing little town of Dordrecht. It was seldom, indeed, that Mr. Martel, whose wishes, or rather whose sudden caprices, formed the one determinative factor in their wandering lives, condescended to patronize such small communities. He loved the big, Continental capitals, the gaming-tables, the glitter of new hotels, and the subdued excitement of crowded dining-halls. Ariadne knew well that his visit to this exquisite, old-world niche had been the direct result, as it were, of a careless phrase of approbation flung toward it by a red-faced Englishman at Brussels. "Quite a jolly little hole, don't you know," Sir Hedworth-Lamson had drawled. "And, by the way, Lady Lamson and I expect to turn up in that neighborhood somewhere near the middle of the month in our yacht, the *Olivia*. If you chance to care for such things, I'll have you and the ladies out for a sail."

This invitation, though casual, had proved a social crumb which, unlike many others, had not been snatched away in the very moment of grasping. The Hedworth-Lamsons had "turned-up," and a few hours earlier Ariadne, thankful that her own excuses had

prevailed, watched the jovial little party embark. It had been months since she had known such respite. Even the two servants had disappeared — Cummins, the English maid, and the unpleasant smiling, quick-eyed valet, François, whose deferential manner toward Martel was in such sinister contrast to the underlying intimacy that seemed to bind the two men together.

From the first moment when she stepped into the flower-ringed space before the railway station, Ariadne had loved this little Dort. No wonder it was called "the Artists' Town"! The brooding tenderness of old Dutch masters hung over the quiet streets. Each opened window was a screen pulled back from a magnified De Hooch, and each unexpected doorway a canvas by Vermeer or Jan Steen come suddenly to life. Even at this late day one needed to be careful in turning corners, lest a precarious easel be upset.

With an interest that the great capitals had never aroused in her, Ariadne began to learn the ways of the small, Dutch town.

For hours at a time she would watch the boats making slow progress into or out of the main artery of a canal, turning it into a perpetual market, where purchasers leaned over to haggle at the unstable booths, and children were continually being plucked back by voluminous Dutch petticoats or trousers, that they might not fall head-first into some crevice of dark water.

She learned for herself that early morning is the true time to catch all the latent loveliness of Holland; and more than once was standing on her chosen bridge as the first vegetable-laden barge pushed through the mists. Under the dawn-glamour the little fleet of peddlers looked like an argosy bearing gems. The dripping



cucumbers were of jade and onyx; the long, bunched carrots gleamed like bars of gold; and the bloated, purple cabbages, under their frost of dew, looked much more like great, rough-hewn amethysts than their humble selves. Soon she began to recognize some of the children by sight, and shyly made friends with them, offering crisp *wafflejes* and hands full of brown *hoppjes*, as she might scatter corn to a covey of distrustful pigeons.

And yet, after each delightful venture, whether beside the stone-walled canals or along narrow, fascinating streets, she would return to her own little nook, feeling that here the natural beauty of the place offered its full splendor.

Her room was at a corner of the old hotel, two floors up, facing the confluence of rivers that was, indeed, little Dort's chief glory. One long window, opening to the floor, gave upon a narrow balcony. At her left the railing, making a sharp angle, ran back to the weather-beaten wall, forming the corner niche which had become her favorite seat. To the right the veranda extended, without interruption, along the water façade of the building. The other windows, opening like her own, belonged to the suite that Mr. Martel and her stepmother now occupied. Directly underneath, starting apparently from the narrow, curved, stone pier, three splendid streams appeared to branch, and one, the widest, ran straight out to the heart of the sunset.

Low marsh lands, level across the surface as a newly clipped lawn, bound the bright, restless waters. Across them she could see, here and there, clusters of trees, blue-green with distance, and standing inevitably near a squat church-tower in keen silhouette, while a little

apart moved the long, wedge-shaped flanges of a sleepy windmill.

In all her wanderings no other country, not even poetic Italy, had touched the girl's heart and imagination as did these little "Nederlands." "What makes you so precious?" she sometimes whispered to it. After all, it was only part of the ordinary earth made up of meadows and cows and buttercups and villages and dear, stolid, human people; but to eyes once streaked with its magic, the cows all turned to ivory and jet, so sleek that the buttercups could almost see themselves reflected in recumbent flanks; the meadows became Olympic terraces, where daisies, dandelions, and buttercups rested like stars, quivering upward at night to their allotted places in a purple sky. Even the village bricks could never have been fashioned from dull clay, or being so, the charm of centuries had changed them into cubes showing a silvery and carnelian bloom.

As for the people — was there another race which so intrinsically possessed, and was in turn possessed by, its inheritance? Holland had literally been made by those whose children now maintained and worshiped her. She had been fought for not only against human enemies, but the eternal menace of the sea. It was a conflict never to be ended. Perhaps because of it one felt that here a love of country, like the quiet, unsleeping vigilance against encroachment, was part of the people's soul. The little, red-tiled cottages, always so gayly painted, the wide-flung tapestries of tulips and narcissi, the endless turning of guardian mills, the clothes and strange gold ornaments of the peasant folk, no less than the pink flesh of their children, were all integrally and fundamentally fibers of a living whole.

Of such things was the young girl dreaming as she sat on the balcony alone. Each moment the descending sun grew a deeper gold; the long shafts of light quivered across a faintly rising mist; out on the watery highways dull orange sails were drifting. The scene was so beautiful, the "holy time" so still, that she felt herself almost happy.

"If only —" she sighed aloud. Somehow there must always be for her those words, "if only." For a moment the bright head drooped. Then, with a little shake of resolution, she lifted it. This day of solitude had been welcomed not only as a boon, but for the opportunity it gave of thinking out a something — a dreadful creeping something — that could no longer be ignored.

Soon Sir Hedworth and his guests would be returning. She had fought the crouching thing all day, or rather, turned her back upon it. Now it must be faced. During the sunlit hours introspection was impossible. She had heard children's voices and met the smile in their blue eyes. Now they were all in bed, each tucked away — the darlings! — in the snug cupboard of a Dutch "interior." This was the time to think.

As if longing, even now, for respite, the girl stood peering to the left and right, and then, with shaded vision, out along the molten surface of the widest stream. There was no sign of the *Olivia*.

She sat down again, drawing in a long, tremulous sigh. Her eyes, deliberately withdrawn from beauty, turned shrinkingly to the dark menace that lay within. "I must have imagined it," she whispered despairingly. "Perhaps I live in myself too much. There is never any one whom I can talk to. I may be growing into one of those morbid, modern women whom novelists

are now writing about. It may be only my nerves, and a doctor would be able to help me."

She stared out, frowning. As if in answer, the image of Martel slowly took shape before her. His beautiful, dark head blotted the sunset. Again his red lips smiled. One delicate hand went up to caress the small mustache, and from under the long lashes he sent again that look that turned her heart to ice — a slow, possessive look that somehow — waited !

She crouched down in her chair, covering her eyes. "Oh, I am surely losing my senses," she shuddered. "He is my stepfather, married to my own dear father's wife. Although during the first long years with him I hated him and was sometimes rude, he was merely indifferent and kind. I blamed myself for not responding to his friendliness. When did this dreadful change, this thing that is in my veins like an eating acid, when did it first begin?"

This was her present task : to trace, no matter with what loathing, each step in a process which had transformed her feelings from shrinking tolerance into a definite, haunting, ever-present fear.

The stepmother had evidently noticed nothing. She appeared to consider Ariadne still a child. The fact that confidences and querulous complaints of "Connie's" neglect were poured into her inexperienced ears made no difference in the attitude. A chiropodist would have served had Ariadne not been near.

Perhaps the first suggestion of evil had been his gift of a little book, a French translation, setting forth the full history of the nymph Ariadne.

The incident had taken place at Nice. Mr. Martel and his valet had just returned from one of those mysterious trips to Paris which, at that time, were of frequent

occurrence. At the ensuing luncheon where Mrs. Martel, as was her custom on such occasions, chattered incessantly of her rapture at her husband's return, he had drawn from his inner pocket a small book, exquisitely bound. Throwing it on the table near his wife, he had remarked carelessly: "Here's a neat little thing I picked up on the Rue de l'Opera."

Donna seized it eagerly, thankful that the clear, gold type did not necessitate the adjustment of her glasses. "How sweet and kind of you, Connie darling!" Then her face fell. "The Loves of Ariadne," she read aloud. "Then it's not for me. You mean it for Ariadne."

"I would have to get an edition de luxe of the old masters to do justice to your name, Madonna. As you surmise, that is intended for Ariadne. I heard her say, not long ago, that she was ignorant of the adventures of her name-nymph. Ariadne of Naxos! I have always thought it a most alluring sound." His long eyes, that always held a hint of mockery in the blue-green depths, smiled across the table.

Donna, completely pacified, held out the charming little volume.

"Is it really for me?" cried the girl, flushing with pleasure and surprise. Gifts were an unusual happening with her. "That was very kind of you, Mr. Martel. I will read it the minute I have finished luncheon."

"I am glad that you like it so much, my dear. Only—" he added, with a queer, low laugh, "I must warn you that I do not hold myself responsible for the morals of your classic sister."

So Ariadne, all impatient for the moment, had hurried to her little room to read. When her cheeks burned, she angrily called herself a prude, a conventional young

idiot. Of course, as Mr. Martel had been thoughtful enough to state, the adventures of a charming, pagan myth were not to be taken personally.

Nevertheless she felt an unconquerable embarrassment at the thought of next meeting him. She dreaded the coming dinner hour, and when the little, triangular party was at last seated, went into a small panic at each pause, for fear that now he was going to question her.

But the courses came and went, and Martel made no allusion. It was characteristic of his wife that she should already have forgotten. Her chief topic, and one which evidently aroused in her the deepest excitement, was the approaching marriage of a certain European princess. Mrs. Martel subscribed to more than one court journal. She referred to all members of royalty by their Christian names, and could, at any moment, have passed a brilliant examination upon their ages, personal appearance, and intricate relationships.

Neither at that time nor afterward had Martel alluded to the book, and while at first the omission brought to the girl only a shy relief, she had later begun to realize that in the man's mind his gift, and her reading of it, had established a new and ineradicable bond.

Other suggestions, even more vague, had followed; a clasp of the hand, less careless, in assisting her from carriages; more frequent and direct appeals to her in conversation which often, now, he led into less personal and more interesting paths, and visits to picture galleries where he would pause long before certain canvases, most of them representing subjects she had been taught to ignore.

He began, with no apparent cause, to frequent concerts, a whim unknown to their first six years together,

and while Mrs. Martel drowsed happily at his other elbow, would talk eagerly and often with deep insight about some marvelous passage that had just been played. Sometimes he would refer to the human experiences of great musicians, pointing out love as the true inspiration of all supreme art. Each hint was so brief, so delicately worded, that a Lady Abbess could scarcely have taken offense. It was only in retrospect, in the placing of one film above the other that the sum, held up against the clear light of reason, took on a dark and menacing outline.

Once, driving home from the opera when the girl sat, as usual, on the small, adjustable taxi-shelf facing her stepmother, Mr. Martel had made some trivial excuse for changing places with his wife. Ariadne, still drowned in harmony, had scarcely noticed the move. It was only when a warm, lithe, silken ankle brushed her own that she came to herself with a start and hurriedly drew her foot away. Martel sat motionless, his face turned. As their little party descended, he did not even touch her hand. Ariadne, hot with shame and indignation, tried to persuade herself that it had not been intended. Surely to no decent girl did such things happen by design! An increase in kind indifference on Martel's part did much to strengthen the desirable belief.

Yet now that she was gathering up her disquieting evidence, the incident would not be put aside. After all was it, as she had so persistently tried to hold, an accident, or merely the snapping of another twig in a jungle?

Mr. Martel, after this, made only very occasional trips to Paris. For six months she had seen him practically every day and often late into the night. He and

Donna loved artificial hours, and the girl could not always find excuses for staying at home. She noticed, too, that he had become more considerate of his wife, bringing her small gifts and often anticipating her pleasures. Ariadne sometimes sickened under the outpourings of her stepmother's fatuous adulation. Her love for the man was an obsession. She shivered with ecstasy if he chanced to touch her. Her foolish, faded face which, by now, had lost its last youthful contour in a mass of unhealthy-looking flesh, turned to his careless words as to a sacrament.

Ariadne was forced to see it all; and as she watched, she seemed to herself like some hunted thing that cowered behind frail, intangible defenses, while nearer, every moment, crept a poisonous night. Out there in the darkness something stole toward her, a something unnamed and terrible, with fangs already bared to strike. She could not flee. All paths were shut to her. She did not even know from which direction the dread might spring. Only it was there — somewhere in this ghastly and newly-created universe, and its most awful attribute was its very formlessness.

Again the girl looked up, pressing cold fingers against her throat. "It is not possible!" she moaned. "No girl should have such fears. I will not think. Dear Lord, cleanse me from these wicked imaginings!"

But then, if all these other fears were demon whispers, what of that book of poetry she found last night upon her pillow? And the carnation, mate to one in Martel's dinner coat, whose hard-pressed petals dyed its pages? The stain had pointed to verses which no clean-minded girl should have been asked to read.

Beaten back now, helpless and faint before the accumulated horrors, Ariadne drooped and for a blessed



interval ceased, in reality, to have the power of logical thought.

From the little town behind her she could hear the sleepy jangle of the one street-car, and the clip of the old horse's hoofs upon the cobbles. She felt, rather than saw, the deepening of the sunset glow. The air was growing cooler. She was grateful for the reviving freshness, and lifting both hands, pushed back the heavy locks of hair.

Unnoted by her in this tortured reverie the first little river-boat was stealing home. She watched it now with eagerness. Silent as a shadow, it moved toward her and the leaning posts that ringed the little pier. Almost furtively, as if ashamed to be taking an early advantage of its comrades, it neared the pilings, then suddenly backed a little, like some great water-beetle with invisible antennæ, and reassured, came back, settling itself with businesslike deliberation into a chosen nook.

A small, shaggy dog rushed to the tip of the up-curved prow, and bracing his small forefeet, set up a furious barking. The old fisherman at the pole gave a gruff, Dutch admonition, at which the dog, after a sheepish glance as if to see whether the foreign girl had noted his humiliation, skulked with dejected tail along the deck and appeared to fling himself into the cabin.

Ariadne laughed; then, startled at the sound, drew herself up to wonder how she had done it. But the question got no farther. Her eyes looked full into the sun's bright face, and before his majesty all personal thought fell away.

Now, almost touching earth, the lower edge was blurring. Quivering marsh-mists seemed drawn up into the sphere, quenching its fire and slowly filling its

smoldering outline. It was a great smoke-bubble, like those her father used to blow for her upon the hearth at Allan Water. Now it was going to strike the green rug of the marshes. Would it break — or flatten itself elastically, as those bubbles of her childhood used to do, bounding disdainfully aside before its silent detonation.

Suddenly it was gone. Three bars of light capped by a yoke of living gold were pressed down into purple darkness. The roses in the sky turned ashen, and in the throbbing gloom one great star took its place, throwing a javelin of light upon the river. Ariadne stared hard at the reflection. The ripples broke and toyed with it. There, just beyond the shortest piling, was the spot where she had hurled the insulting verse. She could see it now, rocking upon the tide and tossing defiant pages, to one of which still clung the red carnation.

She stirred impatiently and turned her face toward the opened window as if considering whether or not the dim room might prove a safer retreat from memory. Half rising, she looked up and down the several streams. There was no hint or sign of the *Olivia*, but now, from all directions, dark shuttles of small craft moved, converging toward the pier. For all the river boats were hurrying home to bed. Such a sleepy, childish, little flock they were — shoving black noses one against the other, elbowing rudely, each determined to push past the rest.

Now a whole covey wedged itself into a common helplessness, held for an instant silent, as its members realized the small catastrophe. Then such a sound of struggle, such plunging of black poles, with grunts and gratings and sharp whistles, a discord made more poignant by the barking of rival dogs. With angry churn-

ings of the water, a small steam tug detached itself, and before the heavier boats could interfere, had rushed into the wharf with a loud hoot of triumph.

A little farther out in the stream a group of white, two-storied, excursion boats, each the property of that mysterious aquatic potentate, "Fop Smit und Zoon," drew to a decorous pause like big sisters at the far end of a nursery. Glancing across electric lighted shoulders to the squabbling infant crew, they seemed to shrug disapprobation, and then, binding themselves together in aloofness, formed a white, brilliant island in the Merwede's center.

Ariadne smiled at the quaint, human comfort of it all. This had become a favorite hour with her. As in the case of the village children, she had begun to know many of the little craft by sight and name. Merwede was the favorite appellation. There were Merwedes I, and II, and III. She had counted up so far as seven. Having herself become a lover of the parent river, she understood their loyalty. Many of the other boats bore women's names, *Lyspeth*, *Juliana*, *Betje* and the inevitable *Maria*; while not a few of the others were called after flowers.

She rose at last, and passing into her room, turned on the one feeble electric light and saw, by her traveling clock, that it was nearly nine. "I knew it was getting late. I had my dinner hours ago," she murmured. "They ought to be bringing Donna home, for the night air is so bad for her rheumatism." Yes, they would soon be here.

The faint, sick feeling swept across her heart. She drew a chair up under the poor light and tried to interest herself in a recent American magazine that Mrs. Martel had finished and passed on to her. The date

was a little old; all of their magazines were old, but that made no difference, as these readers were already so entirely out of touch with anything at home that it was like being interested in the affairs of a separate planet.

The first story that she opened began with the words: "All day the Winston children had been out gathering chinquepins." She shut it together with a snap. Chinquepins! At that moment the prickly, green burrs were swelling on the Virginia hillsides. How many happy times in her own lost childhood had she gathered them. She lifted her hand as in a dream, moving slow fingers as though to feel a something against her throat. So many, many times there had swung from it a long, brown rosary of chinquepins, strung for her by Anguish. The very taste of the hard, sweet kernels grew on her tongue. No, the brown, autumn necklet was not there; her fingers closed only about the usual little chain of silver, a mere gleaming thread, from which hung the half of a broken coin.

She opened the magazine once more and this time warily, as if in fear that a memory, too keen, would spring from it. On the following page was an illustration of an old Virginia homestead. It might have been Allan Water. She sprang up with a sob, letting the pamphlet fall. She could not read that story — not to-night!

Hastily darkening the room, she went again upon the balcony. Her eyes, fixed on the purple silence, saw at first only the one great star. Slowly the earthly outlines grew familiar, the straight marsh-banks holding in darker rivers, and the boats now all asleep. But very close to her, almost beneath her feet, a dim, yellow radiance set in the heart of a huge, pointed shadow,

had nearly touched the pier. She knew it was not the *Olivia*, for that always anchored farther out. It was a last, belated boat, seeking a place to rest.

She could see it now quite plainly. The master, tall and with a quick grace of motion that betrayed his youth, leaned far out and tethered his little home in silence. Immediately the tide swung it sidewise, so that through the squat cabin's opened doorway could be seen a young Dutch mother nursing her child. Over her hung the small oil-lamp, whose glow Ariadne had first seen; but on the sweet, homely face another and more beautiful light was resting. Something warm and tremulous rose to the watcher's throat. The young fisherman went down softly into the cabin. He leaned over, putting a hand upon the sleeping babe, and his wife raised smiling eyes to him.

All at once the scene was blotted out in tears. The girl felt that she could have fallen to the feet of that humble, holy family. Again she put her hand to her throat, this time to check its throbbing. Her hand closed on the coin. "Randy, Randy," she whispered. "Have you forgotten?"

The light in the cabin suddenly went dark. She heard the rude door fastened. Clutching the railings fiercely, she stared across the water, terrified by her own emotions. Why had she thought, just then, of Randy? Why had she called his name? It was years since she had heard from him. Just after Donna's second marriage he had sent a letter so filled with invective against the stepmother and the "Levantine Mixture" she had chosen, so passionate and unrestrained in argument that Ariadne should ignore her father's will and refuse to associate her life with "unnatural and immoral vagabonds whom no decent man — or woman

either — should ever tolerate," that the girl felt a reply impossible.

Since then no word had come. She learned through Cousin Nellie's infrequent and always hasty letters that he had carried out his plan of going to New York and had recently been made junior partner in a prominent law firm. But all this gave no answer to the startled query: Why had his name risen involuntarily, that moment, to her lips?

Even in the cool, night air her cheeks were like fire. "Oh!" she cried out, in desperate self-explanation. "It is because he is clean, and good, and honest. A girl whom he loved would be proud of it. Because he is my friend and said to me: 'If ever you need me, I will come.'"

And now she needed him. More than ever before in all her life she starved and suffered for such friendship, but now, as always, she could not summon him. Donna and her promise to a dying father stood between. Even had she not been so restricted would it be possible, at this late day, to claim his fealty? It was a boy who had so earnestly declared: "No matter how old we are, or how many miles apart, I'll come."

Life, in his chosen groove, could not have used him hardly. Other gifts had probably been showered upon him. Perhaps even now, in the twilight, there was some one near him with upraised eyes, happy as the little Dutch wife yonder! The girl stirred wretchedly. She felt the knife as it rent the cherry-tree. Her head went down in humiliation, and she longed consciously that the dark, cool waters of the Merwede could close above it.

The swift panting of a gasoline launch and the sound of distant laughter from the river brought her thoughts

back with a shock. The *Olivia* had returned. With her long, white flanks and lifted prow she seemed a sort of greyhound of the deep. The launch drove like an arrow toward the shore. The girl rose like a hunted thing, and again entering her room, threw herself face-down upon the bed, and lay there in darkness, quivering, until she heard Donna, puffing and chattering, begin the ascent of the hotel stairs.

"Ariad-nee!" came the high, thin voice.

Ariadne rose and dragged herself toward her step-mother's apartments. Just as she entered, that exhausted lady had fallen, rather than seated herself, upon the nearest cushioned chair. Martel, a dark shadow at which the girl did not look, stood somewhere near.

"Well, I am tired!" exclaimed Mrs. Martel. "I'm just about ready to collapse. But we have had the most wonderful day, haven't we, Connie?"

As Connie did not answer, she hurried on as well as she could for gasping. "You certainly missed it by staying away, Ariadne. You would have loved the sunset. But, after all —" here she laughed consciously. "It was a rather highly seasoned party for a girl. I never drank such champagne in all my life, and Sir Hedworth took good care that our glasses should not stand empty. I am afraid we all had a little more than we should, — even Connie, bad boy that he is!" She turned to shake a playful finger at her husband. "It was Lady Lamson who insisted he should drink. The creature actually made love to him under my very nose. And Connie is generally so abstemious!"

The silhouette of Martel's figure appeared to sway a very little. Reaching out, he found a chair which he drew up just behind that of his wife. Donna began to

unfasten her collar at the back. Her hand was evidently unsteady.

"Where is that Cummins?" she questioned fretfully.

"Shall I try to find her for you?" asked the girl, thankful for the opportunity to escape.

"Yes, dear, if you will."

Martel rose also. Ariadne drew back. She had caught a glimpse of his face, which instead of showing its usual cool pallor was flushed to a dull red. His eyes were strangely unsteady. They moved swiftly from side to side like those of a pinioned snake. She determined not to pass out into the corridor with him and now waited to see what his next move would be.

Continuing to ignore her, he leaned down to his wife. "I do feel a bit heady after all that wine," his soft voice told her. "I think I had better take a turn in the fresh air."

"Yes, darling. You'll sleep better for it, I know," she encouraged, tenderly. As he went, her pale, adoring eyes followed him. She drew an enormous, lingering sigh, whether of love or fatigue Ariadne did not try to guess.

When Cummins was discovered flirting under the hotel arch with the Dutch car-driver and sent up to her mistress, Ariadne again sought the shelter of her little room. Sleep was, for the moment, impossible. Without turning on the light, she stole softly to the balcony. At first she moved with caution, peering down into the street to see whether Martel had gone out to the pier. There was no human figure, only the gaunt, leaning piles and the tethered flock of sleeping boats.

The peace of the starry night was hers once more. From along the balcony came Donna's tired, carping voice, giving directions to her maid. The girl tried



not to listen. Resting one arm along the balcony rail, she bent her head to it, and then curving the other arm laid it against her ear, so that the soft flesh dulled her sense of hearing. She did not try to think now or to struggle against her terrors. She knew that she was afraid, utterly, unspeakably, impotently afraid, and the sight of that drunken face had made the horror tangible. When she was not so tired and cowering, she would plan a way to go off to herself, if only for a week. The promise to her father did not preclude an occasional absence. Perhaps she could even get home for a little visit to Virginia. At this her courage rose. Yes, she would demand it. The strain had become too great to endure without a respite. She would talk to Donna the first thing next morning. Her nerves and these spells of faintness would serve for an excuse.

Feeling at last comforted, and believing that she could now find rest, she was about to lift her head when a shiver, running along the veranda floor, made her start up quickly.

A man's figure was stealing toward her, finding its way by the outstretched fingers of a hand against the wall.

He had just passed Donna's closed shutters and advanced now with a panther-like celerity.

The girl sprang to her feet, and seeing that he had already blocked the entrance to her room, stood at bay. Her first thought was: "No matter what his wickedness, or how drunk he may be, he cannot really harm me here." She braced herself tightly in the corner of the balcony, her hands, at each side, fastening upon the iron railings.

Martel caught with such unexpected strength and suddenness at one of them that her hold was torn away.

He grasped her wrist in metal fingers, then tried to gain the other hand. This she kept fast as though it had become part of the old wrought iron. Now he bent down his face. The feverish breath, heavy with alcohol, poured full upon her. She heard the whispered triumph :

“Oh, my Ariadne — mine at last ! It is your vine-wreathed Bacchus who pursues you. Don’t turn from me. Give me your lips — your young lips — Ariadne of Naxos !”

She did not try to speak. In his drunken eagerness it was not difficult to elude the intended caresses. Her mind grew sharp and clear. It told her that she must not make a sound that might bring Donna to the window. From the first hideous instant she had realized that she must strike the man, but even now, in the crux of it, caution whispered that it must not be his face. Unseen by him she moved her left hand from the railing, sending it, by stealthy inches, toward the chair. The back of this she grasped that it might not fall and clatter upon the floor. Then, gathering the full strength of her healthy, lithe, young body, she freed the other hand and with it struck him full upon the heart. He reeled back, clutching at his breast in agony. Like herself, he had given no cry. Slowly, without effect of haste or agitation, she now walked past him, and entering her room, bolted the heavy blinds.

In the morning Cummins, entering with tea, informed her that Mr. Martel and François had left by an early train for Paris, and that “Madame had took on something dreadful.”

## CHAPTER II

THE little *portier*, patron saint and referee for half the migratory denizens of earth, stood in the doorway of his castle, or, to be more accurate and less grandiloquent, at the entrance of the famous Hotel Vieux Doelen at the Hague. The granite doorstone on a level with the small-bricked pavement had been worn to a hollow, most inconvenient for holding rain, but becoming thereby a boon to thirsty dogs.

Before him spread the great, tree-set Tournooiveld, once the open playground of a brotherhood of gay knights, who here held jousts and shot at painted "Doelen" targets, retiring after the sport, to drink and loiter in the spacious Doelen-haus, passing, a rustling, silken, merry company, through this same door where now a solitary figure seemed keeping watch.

In spite of the wrinkles about his kind old eyes, and the gray hair which stuck out thinly like iron filings from a highly magnetized egg, the *portier*, in these surroundings, had an air of modernness and youth. To himself he was very old. For nearly fifty years, as he will tell you if he ever gets a chance, he had been part of the old Doelen; first as an apple-cheeked page-boy, and afterwards, through gradual stages, to the all-powerful eminence of *portier*. He could speak a little of all languages and in each understood much more than it was sometimes prudent to admit. In spite of his small, Dutch cottage with a red-bricked courtyard,

which Peter de Hooch surely must have seen, in spite of the fat Dutch "Vrouw," his wife, and the little orphaned grandchild who was the core of their united hearts, the little *portier* felt that the big hotel was more fundamentally his home.

Near his feet lolled his inseparable companion, a whitish, amorphous, female dog of a breed so indeterminate that all the canine strains of Europe must have met, somehow, in her small, overfed body. The May sun felt good to her. Sometimes she rolled over slowly, at which her master half unconsciously put out a pudgy foot, pressing down the well-covered ribs gently and murmuring some Dutch endearment.

The old man's pleasant wrinkles suddenly converged. Through the trunks of the lindens he had caught sight of the hurrying figure of a girl in a long, gray coat. Her soft walking hat was of the same color, and had for ornament two long quills, one blue, the other of a glowing orange, thrust through the upturned brim. On seeing him she smiled and waved a dull red paper parcel. Her other hand held lilies of the valley.

"Has Mrs. Martel asked for me?" was her first eager question.

"Nay, mademoiselle, I t'ink not so. De Engleech maid go for a small walk after de luncheon and tell me she will coom back at five o'clock to fetch Madame's tea. Until den, Madame iss not to be disturb'."

"It must be getting toward five now," conjectured the girl. "The sun is already tossing about in the linden boughs. I stayed away longer than I expected, but I just couldn't leave that fascinating little bazaar on the Lange Pooten! See, here is something that I have bought."

She gave him her lilies to hold, and bending over,

her cheeks flushed by shyness rather than with the intricacies of Dutch knots, unfastened her parcel and disclosed a doll brilliantly dressed in complete native costume, even to the wooden sabots and a copper milk-pail on each arm.

"There!" she exclaimed, holding it up for him to admire. "Isn't she a darling? I got it for Betje. Will you take it to her with Miss Skipwith's love?"

The little *portier* looked as if he were going to cry. "But, Mademoiselle," he stammered, "it is too gran', too splendide, for a small *meisje* of de peoples, such as my gran'daughter!"

"Nothing could be too pretty for Betje!" asserted the girl, laughing at his pleasure and her own. "She is the dearest, gentlest, little thing! I want you to bring her to see me again, please. She is getting over her timidity with me. And look!" Once more she bent to the package, drawing forth this time a gaudy, illustrated primer. "This is for Betje to begin giving me the promised lessons in Dutch."

"Your heart, like to de face of you, is an angel, Mademoiselle," choked the old man. "Ya, she shall be brung; wid de bes' sabot cap upon, and in her arms de beauteous *poppen*. An' vill she be happy! Ah, Mademoiselle, you would haf' to be born de Dutch *kind* to know how happy!"

"I would like to sit right down here under the trees and play with that *poppen* myself," confessed Ariadne with a shy laugh. "I have never got over wanting to. I don't like to be grown up. But I am!" She gave a little sigh of exaggerated regret, while her eyes still sparkled.

"That makes me think! Is there no letter for me yet, *portier*?"

The old man shook his head. He longed for a plethoric bag of them to offer. "Nay," he said mournfully, "not even one; an' de next post, he is of morning."

Stifling a sigh which this time would have been genuine, she mounted the two flights of stairs somewhat pensively. She did not doubt for an instant that grandma had remembered. This would not be the first of her itinerant birthdays on which the distant home greetings had been late.

Pausing at her stepmother's door, she listened for a sound. All was quiet as a crypt. Mounting a third flight, narrow and ridiculously steep, she gained her own small chamber. This was at the very top of the old-fashioned edifice and formed one of a series called somewhat ignominiously, the "Maids' Row." Cummins occupied a similar apartment at the other end of the corridor.

When Mrs. Martel two weeks before, the day, in fact, after her husband's hasty departure from Dordrecht, had moved on to the Hague, this was the only sleeping place available. Having once unpacked her few personal effects and become accustomed to the tiny room, Ariadne found herself reluctant to leave it, even for a more desirable chamber.

She liked the one square window with its jutting sill, and the outlook across the wide Tournooiveld. In Dort she had watched the ebb and flow of liquid tides, and from this new eyrie she could follow the whole life of a city as it drifted by. Noisy tram-cars clanged and whizzed among the rigid tree-trunks. A string of rusty, antiquated landaus that pinioned dejected horses stood in an unbroken line toward the center of the space. Apparently they were never employed, and yet from dawn until late into the night they formed a hopeless

battle-front against taxicabs and despair. Flower peddlers and small milk-carts, often drawn by dogs, stationed themselves in the shadows of the lindens. Through wind-swayed branches the girl could see the unpretentious façade of the Queen-mother's city home, differentiated from its sober colleagues only by a pair of little soldiers, each with his absurd small pepper-box of a sentry-house to which he was privileged to retire in case of rain.

There were statues in the square, bronze blotches held up high on granite pedestals. No one ever seemed to look at them, not even on market days when each cliff-like base rose from a new-spilled sea of red geraniums. One little pot of the scarlet flamers now stood in Ariadne's window.

The girl threw her hat on to the bed and dropped her coat on the nearest chair, from which immediately it needed to be removed.

There was but one chair in the room, and Ariadne now required it for a window-seat. She drew it up and looked out with eyes which were, at first, unobservant. A little calendar hung on the wall near by.

"The twenty-second of May, and I am twenty-two," her lips murmured. The words had become a sort of dolorous refrain. That morning, on first waking, she had smiled at a childish, fluttering hope that somehow would not be denied. There seemed a mystic significance in the repeated number. Surely something good must come to her on such a day. But the sun which had risen gloriously would soon go down behind the lowest of the staid, Dutch houses opposite, then a few hours of deepening twilight, and then the dark. Nothing had happened, unless she were to count as fortune's gift the continued absence of Mr. Martel.

Earlier in the day her stepmother had received a letter from him, one so disturbing that the nervous headache had been a direct result. There had been something about a pressing demand for money. He had met with losses. All financial matters being an unknown language to the girl, she had not been able to affect any special interest. The words that brought her personal alarm were these: "You may expect me to join you now at a few hours' notice."

Before he came, she must force herself to speak with Donna about her own affairs. The desire for a few weeks of freedom, which became a conscious thought at Dort, had grown since into a passion of longing. How could she face Martel so soon and take up the old desultory life as if nothing terrible had happened?

Cummins stood primly in the doorway.

"Madame's compliments, Miss Skipwith, and would you care to 'ave tea with 'er in 'er sitting-room?"

Ariadne sprang to her feet, her face brightening. "So she is up! I'm very glad. Of course I will come at once." She caught up the lilies-of-the-valley, drying the water from their succulent stems. "Does the headache seem quite gone, Cummins?"

"So Madame says," answered the woman doubtfully. "But in my h'eyes she looks bad. There is something more the matter than 'eadache, I'm thinking."

"I do wish we could persuade her to see a doctor," frowned the girl and then, not waiting for a reply, went past the maid and down to Donna's sitting-room.

Mrs. Martel was seated in a crimson velvet armchair near a window. Her lounging robe of mauve crêpe turned the pallor of her face to a ghastly yellow.

"Oh, I am all right again," she asserted, in response to her stepdaughter's inquiries. "Those powders and



the long nap have driven the worst of the pain away. My eyes still feel a little heavy. Will you sit over there and pour the tea?"

"Here are some flowers I have brought," said Ariadne, offering them a little timidly. "I know they are your favorites."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Martel, accepting the gift without effusion. "Get some sort of a vase—that drinking glass will do—and don't set them down too close to me."

"Yes, they are my favorites," she vouchsafed later, gazing moodily across the room at them. "They always make me think of tears—a woman's tears."

Ariadne achieved a soothing murmur as she took her place at the tea-table. Having heard this lachrymose comparison many scores of times before, she was unable, at short notice, to offer a more satisfactory response.

"I bought them from a poor old blind man in that long arcade that leads from the Veenstraat. You know—the one that bends in the middle and has such pretty shops."

"I can't remember these Dutch places," said Donna fretfully. "But it was sweet of you to bring them. Any token of affection is especially grateful to me to-day. This letter of Connie's has nearly driven me mad."

"I am sorry. I hope I haven't made your tea too sweet," murmured the girl, rising to place the cup at Mrs. Martel's elbow.

"What on earth can he want with twenty thousand dollars all at once?"

Ariadne wished to appear sympathetic, but there seemed nothing that she could say.

"Oh, well," sighed the other, "there's nothing for it

but to do as he suggests and write an urgent letter to Judge Henry. Not that I believe it will do any good — the old skinflint !”

“You have no right to speak that way of Cousin Judge, Donna,” cried the girl. “He is the most generous, upright man possible. I have heard you say more than once that he is sending you bigger payments all the time.”

“That’s because he can’t help himself,” retorted Mrs. Martel. “The income is mostly from those mines, and they were as much Mr. Skipwith’s as his. He wouldn’t dare keep back any of my half !”

Ariadne swallowed her tea hastily. It had a bitter taste. She knew that her stepmother’s accusations were unfounded and unjust, but had no argument with which to combat them.

Mrs. Martel watched the changing expressions. At first her own discontented eyes expressed merely petulance, but slowly there crept into them a look of cunning.

“I suppose if I do decide to write,” she began, and as she spoke she folded a thin slice of bread together so that the buttered surfaces would stick, “you are willing to sign your name along with mine ?”

The girl’s astonishment was obvious. “How could my name help ? I don’t know anything about your income, not even when you get it !”

“And quite properly, too,” affirmed the elder woman, “a child like you !” For all her confidence, Mrs. Martel was annoyed to feel that she was reddening.

Ariadne fixed clear and quiet eyes upon her. “I am not a child, Donna, even though you still call me one. Long before my age my young mother was a married woman, and I was a baby more than a year old. I am twenty-two this day.”

Mrs. Martel emitted a sound of shocked surprise. "Is this your birthday! Why, of course. I can't tell you how sorry I am that I forgot it, Ariadne. If it hadn't been that I was beside myself over this letter —!" She lifted to view, in demonstration, the open page that had been hidden in the folds of her purple robe. "Never mind, I'll get you something really handsome in the morning — the very first thing!"

"That is kind, but please don't bother," Ariadne said gently; "I have more pretty clothes and ornaments now than I can wear. But, Donna, if you really are sorry, if you want to make me very, very happy —" She broke off, frightened by the imminence of the hazard. Already she could see how Donna shrank and put up her defense.

"Something," the low voice hurried on, "that would give me more happiness than anything else on earth —"

"Well, let us have it!" challenged the stepmother sharply.

"It is to make a little visit somewhere by myself — maybe as far as Virginia. I have been dreadfully homesick of late and —"

"You want to go away from me and Connie!" the other struck in, as if doubting her own sense of hearing.

"Only for a few weeks. I shall come back. My absence will not make any difference in — in — business," the girl finished despairingly.

"It is simply not to be thought of!" ejaculated Mrs. Martel, turning down a metaphorical thumb. "I am surprised that you should be unkind enough to suggest it, when you see that I am worried to death already. Why, such a trip would take hundreds and hundreds of dollars! Please don't distress me by referring to it again."

Ariadne sat silent. It had been a feeble little flame at best. Now she could feel it sinking, dying within her heart.

The elder woman strove for an air of virtuous indignation. Her stout shoulders moved restlessly from side to side.

"It isn't the money only," she compromised, after an arid pause, "but I don't think that you should be willing to leave me when you know that I am not well. I have suffered to-day not only with a headache, but that other thing I told you about." There was a quiver of self-pity in the thin voice.

Ariadne lifted her face from an altar on which the last spark had died.

"I can be of no help to you even in this, Donna," she said wearily; "you will not listen when I urge the only thing to do."

"No, I don't intend to have any of these foreign men who call themselves doctors poking over me. Connie says they are all a set of frauds. Please dress to-night, Ariadne. I am going down to dine. These private meals without Connie are too dreadful!"

"I will be ready at eight," agreed the girl in a lifeless voice. She rose, moving slowly, as if vitality and even youth had fled from her young limbs. In passing her stepmother she paused. Donna, still fidgeting, kept her eyes among the tea-things. Inwardly she cowered, for she was not, integrally, a valiant soul. When Ariadne spoke, it seemed to be from far away.

"I think — that in all the years we have been together, this is the first thing I have ever asked of you, Madonna."

When she had gone the elder woman leaned back defiantly. A thousand justifications and resentments

rose to her mind. Ariadne had been strangely inconsiderate, even cruel. This was the girl's return for all the stepmother's devotion, for the money lavished on her clothes. Desperately she swung the flagellating phrases. Across the room stole the faint perfume of the lilies. Mrs. Martel's face suddenly went down. The little that was real in her knew she had bruised a flower — and was ashamed.

More than an hour before she needed to dress, Ariadne was thinking, as she looked at the traveling clock upon her quaint Dutch mantel shelf. "Well, I am glad. Perhaps after a rest I shall not feel quite so miserable."

Now she removed the street dress and took down the long, heavy hair. Again she went to the window. The big square had grown quiet. The Dutch dined early. The leaves of the lindens, moving softly, made a subtle rhythm in the wind. White clouds, gilded from underneath by a vanished sun, drifted like golden barges heaped with snow, less tangible than had been the hope just shattered by her stepmother.

And yet something, perhaps the ghost of the vanished hope, persisted, tugging at her as a fretful child at its mother's skirt. Even though the stepmother had refused, was dull submission the one alternative? Why should she not write in her own behalf to Cousin Judge? He was her kinsman and her father's friend. If this desire of hers was indeed, as Donna claimed, ungrateful, he would gently tell her so and would maybe advise her how best to face the dreary outlook. If Randy were in Culpeper, she knew how ardently he would plead her cause. But Randy had gone to big New York and forgotten, most likely, that she ever had existed.

The young Virginian had been in her thoughts since morning. It was always specially the case on her birth-

days. She loved then consciously to recall each word of their interview at the youpon hedge, and with each year the memory, far from paling, gained a more vivid tone, as every added league of air spreads deeper blue upon a distant mountain.

She took her elbows from the window-ledge. They were pink and wrinkled from pressure on the stone. She felt them ruefully, and then tilting her chair, with feet braced against the edge of her steamer trunk, put up her arms and slowly lifted two long, bright wings of hair. Her silken kimono sleeves, slipping downwards, left the young arms free.

At their extreme reach the fingers could still intertwine the fine-spun meshes, and she held these lines horizontal, while from them looped and shimmered a golden web. Even in so dim a light it glittered, as though it had ensnared memories of the sun. She brought the left hand nearer, poising it above her head, and saw the lindens through a mist of yellow light. The sparkle for an instant was reflected in her eyes, then again they grew somber.

"What's the use of its shining like that?" she asked herself forlornly. "I'd chop it all off with a hatchet this minute for just one day at home!"

She let it fall and rose to her feet to begin the monotonous evening toilet. All at once there came a loud "honking" from the court below, and the whizz of an approaching motor. The old white dog gave her hollow bark of welcome. A dreadful premonition sent the girl speeding to the window. Forgetting her bright disarray, she leaned far out and paused there in the sudden relief of seeing that the newcomer was a stranger. She did not realize that the person in the taxi had his eyes fixed upon her, that he had stared, transfixed, and then

suddenly pulled down the tan traveling hat with apologetic vehemence.

Indeed, Ariadne had not seen his face at all. The fact that he sat in the cab, with his modest hand-luggage on the seat beside him, and a single small trunk propped up by the driver's knees in front, had been enough to quell her fears. She did not need to let her gaze skim past him in search of a second vehicle, which would have been piled high with costly "boxes," and presided over by a swarthy, black-eyed valet.

She caught back the golden veil, flinging it past her shoulders, and again leaned over, but now with caution, to watch the arrival of the guest.

The little *portier* stood in readiness, making now and then a gesture to silence the barking dog. A little "buttons" appeared at the *portier's* elbow. The passenger already had a lean, ungloved hand upon the carriage door. Ariadne had thought from the cut of his traveling coat that he might be English, but she knew now that he was surely American. Only Americans abroad ever do things for themselves.

Almost before the car stopped he was out of it. Buttons, jabbering excited Dutch, strove valiantly with the traveler for his handbag.

"All right, sonny, if it's that much to you," said a voice rich and now vibrant with amusement.

"An American!" whispered Ariadne, rocking her arms at the discovery. "I believe he is a Virginian, too."

The newcomer now produced a pocketbook and advanced to pay off the driver, which he did, remaining oblivious to the *portier's* reiterated protests that "de hotel do all such t'ing for M'sieur."

A second page, clambering into the vacated taxi, got on his knees to peer into each corner, even reaching down

under the seat, as if perhaps a collar button or a hoped-for coin might have gone astray.

At length the small procession defiled within doors. Ariadne, listening, heard them coming up the perpendicular flight of steps to her very door. They paused, and the mingled footsteps retreated to the other end of her corridor.

She rang for hot water. Somehow the necessity of dressing had begun to seem less arid. Dipping the dusty elbows in a basin of water, she was surprised to find herself smiling. It was absurd that an incident so trivial and so far apart from her own concerns should have become of real interest. She had watched the arrival and departure of a thousand hotel visitors without having given them a second thought. But now, all through the stages of her toilet, recollections of the tall youth beside the taxicab register, his business-like scrutiny of the handful of unfamiliar coins, and the intent, pained faces of the surrounding menials, returned to her in dimples.

"I suppose it is because I am so homesick that everybody looks like Randy," she sighed, opening the tiny wardrobe where her evening gowns hung.

She drew out one of delicate green, made in the latest mode and trimmed with an exquisite embroidery of gold, just touched with black and a few threads of a dull orange. Holding this up by the shoulder-rack, she slowly revolved it and then shook her head. It was too décolleté, and besides, she did not feel like green. Next she took down the frock that was her favorite, a long, straight gown with very simple, flowing lines. Its color was that of a wild morning-glory, edged with a delicate, dew-like tracery of small, crystal beads. The pointed neck came high enough to conceal the pendant



coin. She wore no other jewelry, and the simple curves of her hair were held in place by pins of a bluish mother-of-pearl. When all was finished, she stood gazing a little wistfully at her reflected image. Even the jaundiced tones of the glass and its sadly spotted surface could not hide the fact that she was beautiful. But, as she had said about her hair, what was the use? At Cummins' summoning knock she caught up a scarf of white tulle, and flinging it loosely about her throat, joined her stepmother in the lounge that gave into the great dining-salon.

As she followed the stately, if squat figure, robed in amethyst and glittering with cut-steel sequins, Ariadne felt rather than saw that the tan-clad stranger, now in conventional evening dress, was already seated at a corner table. When the two ladies were in their accustomed places, the girl's back was turned to him and Donna, on her left, sat in profile. Ariadne could not have said just why, but she hoped that her stepmother would not stare at him as she often did at newcomers, lifting her jeweled *lorgnon* with a manner borrowed from haughty, titled dames. Each time that Donna's gaze appeared to wander, her companion leaned forward quickly, forcing attention back upon herself.

Always she was conscious of that slender, silent figure in black, with the high white collar and shirt front. Once she found herself listening as he gave his waiter an order, and then with an inward exclamation asked herself what had come to her that she should be seized by this vulgar and unusual curiosity.

Since Mrs. Martel possessed two interests only, herself and her Connie, the girl was hard put to it for intelligent topics of conversation and was finally driven to the overworked theme of her stepmother's "symptoms."

"I can't say that I actually suffer," that lady was now explaining in answer to a sympathetic query, "I have always been a victim to these wretched nervous headaches, as you know. My soul and body are very sensitively attuned. But I don't feel right. I'm sure these places on my neck are swelling. Help me to remember to get out my pearl dog-collar before Connie comes. Don't you notice what I mean? Here, on the left side, especially." She turned her ornamented head far to one side and slowly pivoted the distorted column of her throat. In doing so her eyes met, straight and full, those of the young man in the corner. She straightened with the shock of surprise.

"Why, Ariadne!" she gasped, "I do believe there's Randy Carr! It is. He's bowing to me. Mr. Carr!" she cried excitedly, while waiters and the other diners stared. "Come over here at once!"

Young Carr, his face the color of one of the immense strawberries he had just been eating, rose and moved swiftly across the room.

"Sit right down and have your coffee with us," Mrs. Martel commanded hospitably. "Of all people! Where on earth did you come from?"

While answering these and similar banal questions, the young man's gaze went constantly to the girl on his other side. The chair which an assiduous waiter had instantly placed for him had been between the ladies, on the matron's right. Ariadne had no chance of speaking, but her eyes seemed to grow, at every instant, larger, deeper, and more brilliant. No one had thought of shaking hands. One loses the way of it upon the Continent.

In the first pause, Randolph leaned eagerly to her. "So it was you with the hair!"

"The hair!" echoed Mrs. Martel, and looked suspiciously from one glowing young face to the other. "What on earth do you mean, Mr. Carr? You couldn't very well see Ariadne without her hair."

"I hardly know what I do mean," laughed the Virginian. "The sight of you two has nearly knocked me off my pins! How long are you staying here?"

"We never know," answered the elder woman with a resigned gesture. "It all depends on Connie — that is, my husband, Mr. Martel, you know."

"He is not with you now?"

"Not at present, I am sorry to say; but we are expecting him at almost any time."

Still Ariadne had not spoken. Indeed she had no power of words and no desire to speak. Randy was here, beside her. She scarcely dared believe that it had really happened. She feared almost to move, lest the apparition might dissolve. He had come on her birthday, too. The wakening hope had not been, after all, a mockery.

But how much older and more dignified he had grown! Surely at Allan Water he had not been half so handsome! The clear brown-red of his skin, the eager, hazel eyes and the thick, short hair colored like new bronze, had all gained depth and tone and a certain unity which in his boyish comeliness had merely been suggested.

Mrs. Martel's loquacity gave no surcease. Her questions crowded forth, seldom pausing for a full response. She complimented the young man on his personal appearance, at which inwardly he swore, and inquired after his Virginia relatives in a way which showed that she still thought him a resident of Culpeper. He was not given the opportunity of enlightening her on this, or indeed, on many other points. When she demanded of him, more intelligently, whether he still continued to

practice law, he answered lightly: "That is what I'm supposed to do."

At this Mrs. Martel grew thoughtful.

"Then maybe you can help me out," she said in a bantering tone, which, nevertheless, had a ring of earnestness. Before he could reply, she added: "Yes, I believe you are the very one. You're in Judge Henry's office yet, are you not?"

"I haven't lived in Culpeper for six years," the lawyer replied quickly. "I'm in New York."

"Oh, I am sorry," exclaimed Mrs. Martel in evident disappointment.

A brief silence fell, in which he turned again to Ariadne. "One great hope I had in coming over," he began, speaking as if to the elder lady, but with eyes that smiled on Ariadne, "was that I should have the good fortune to run across Miss Skipwith. It's been a mighty long time since I last saw her."

"Seven years," breathed the girl, as if he had compelled the words from her parted lips.

Randy drew out a hidden watch and, for an instant, displayed it beneath the screening table-edge. From the black fob hung the half of a silver coin.

"It is hot!" remarked Mrs. Martel innocently. "Both your faces are as red as fire. I feel that mine is, too."

She made a motion to rise. The young man, hastily ramming the watch back to his pocket, went to her assistance.

"Thank you, and — good night, Mr. Carr," she said graciously. "It has been very pleasant to see you, though, of course, the memories —" Her voice quavered.

"But you're not going to run away like this!" Ran-

dolph protested in dismay. "I haven't begun to see you, yet."

"I am sorry, but I happen to be something of an invalid just now. I know it is better for me to retire early. You will be here for a day or two longer, won't you?"

"My movements, like your own, are an uncertain quantity," fenced the young lawyer.

The three passed out of the long room together. At the foot of the steps Randolph boldly took the girl's hand in both of his.

"At least I must congratulate my little Virginia cousin on her birthday," he said gently.

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### CHAPTER III

UNTIL now a restless night was an affliction unknown to Randy Carr. As in younger days he might inelegantly have expressed it, he always slept like a "nigger full of possum."

After a desultory unpacking of his bags, followed by a succession of cigarettes warranted to undo the soporific effects of many possums, he had at last got to bed.

"Talk about gridirons and potato sacks!" he muttered, plunging about like a dolphin on the excellent Doelen mattress.

Turning on the electricity an hour later, the light showed a bed that resembled a collapsed balloon. In desperation he rang the bell and demanded a whisky-and-soda. The waiter, a recent importation from Bavaria, brought him a whisk-broom. Randolph hurled it from him and made gestures to indicate a sudden and overwhelming desire for strong drink. The trembling menial fled, returning later with his national panacea, Munich beer, and nodded with satisfaction as he watched the liquid disappear. He knew well its soothing qualities.

Catching sight of the bed, he spread it back into order and finally departed, sending a commiserating glance toward the agitated, but very generous young Herr, who, as his sentimental nature whispered, must surely be in love. What else could have such power to disturb one so young, apparently so wealthy, and so very good to look upon?

"Ach Gott!" murmured the lad as he lifted the glass and drained the few remaining drops. "The Flower-maiden ensnares us all! Where is my Gretchen?"

Under the double alleviations of the beer and sheets newly smoothed, Randolph fell at once into a heavy sleep, from which he was awakened by the clatter of the outside world. He reached out for his watch; it was only six o'clock. He lay back on the pillow and slowly drew the fob through his fingers until they reached the coin. He smiled at the jagged edges. Did Ariadne wear hers, too? He had noted the thread-like, silver chain, but had scarcely dared to hope that his boyish gift still found a resting-place so hidden and so pure. He closed his eyes now, recalling the contour of her delicate face. She was almost unnecessarily beautiful. Even in his dreams she had never grown into such white and gold and jeweled loveliness. He sighed; somehow her beauty troubled him.

"Ariadne of Allan Water!" How the name suited her! "My lady, Ariadne," he whispered; then his eyes clouded. But what companionship! He marveled that she had been able to endure so many years of it, remaining, as he had seen, still exquisite and uncontaminated.

To remain longer in bed was an impossibility. He rang for a bath, then shaved and dressed slowly, as he thought. Hopefully he lifted his watch; it was barely seven.

"I suppose nobody in their senses ever has breakfast here until eight," he thought, scowling out across the Tournooiveld. "I'll go out for a sprint; I need it!"

At this moment there emerged from the hotel doorway one of the smart, green-clad, bright-faced pages, known as Peetje — a name so delightfully appropriate one grieved to learn that it, along with the rosy boy, would

some day pass into an adult Peter. He bore rather carefully a newspaper held together by the corners. In walking he had made little sound; not the ghost of a whistle had issued from his lips, and yet, as if to a summons, all the sparrows in the world — or so it seemed to the astonished watcher from above — dropped simultaneously from the trees and encircled the boy in a screaming, chirruping, brown cloud of feathers. Had they been parrot-green instead of brown, one might have expected to see the tree-limbs bare of foliage.

Unmoved by their excitement, the boy continued his progress to the foot of the tallest linden and there, stooping, let one corner of the parcel fall, depositing a heap of bread-crumbs, bits of toast and cake. The birds instantly hid the food from view, while at the sound of their shrill wrangling still other sparrows from more distant boughs shot through the morning to hurl themselves in clusters upon the protesting mass of greedy birds. Peetje stood up, folded the paper neatly, and went back into the hotel, this kindly function being obviously but a part of the day's routine.

Now the old *portier* strolled out. In his mouth was a gigantic cigar as brown as one of the twittering sparrows. He gazed around condescendingly upon the universe at large, then bent his head, and folding his hands behind him in a Napoleonic pose, commenced a slow, thoughtful pacing back and forth. Behind him the white dog trotted, turning as he turned, and lifting her plebeian countenance now and then for a look or nod of recognition.

"Me for the open road!" exclaimed the young American, and hastened down the stairs with a careless buoyancy that brought smothered curses from behind more than one closed door.



At the sight of him the *portier* advanced. "Ah! Monsieur, annuder early one!" he greeted pleasantly. "You do well to seek de day when he iss new, monsieur, so many stupid ones dere are to sleep." He gave a wave of humorous contempt upward to the façade of the building, where indeed but two of the many windows showed their thick curtains drawn.

"Yes, it was too jolly for bed. I felt I must be out. Where can I take a stroll and not lose myself?"

The *portier* appeared to be considering; old Machem rubbed her head against the young man's trousers. He stooped for an instinctive pat and a "Good old doggie."

"You will go to de Vyver," said the old man with decision. "He is not far; you can see de shining through de trees at der end of dis square. Ja, you will like our Vyver!"

As Randolph thanked him and swung his broad shoulders along the close-set pavement, the *portier's* smiling wrinkles very nearly sent his glasses to the bricks. Machem looked up inquiringly. The *portier* stopped to pat her as the young man had done.

"We know a good heart when it opens to us, do we not, my Machem?" he murmured in Dutch.

The old dog wagged what was meant to be a tail. She loved to hear her master use that tone. It sounded like her favorite kind of cake.

"Now what in thunder is a Vyver?" young Carr was speculating. "It might be a statue, or a town-hall, or a cemetery! Anyway, I'll keep on until something happens."

It had happened! Randolph came to an ecstatic halt. "So this is why the *portier's* eyes were dancing!"

Ariadne stood alone at the brink of an inclosed rectangle of shining water, looking out apparently to a small,

wooded island in its midst. Over her head pink-flowering chestnut trees, the color of crape-myrtle blossoms at home, spread broad, low branches. Now and again a floret, overcome by curiosity, loosed its tiny clutch and fell reeling dizzily upon her.

He cared no longer for the Vyver and its meaning. Now he walked cautiously. He wished to come upon her unawares, to see whether her face would flash spontaneous welcome. It was hard to move slowly. The gravel squeaked like so many tiny bagpipes. He was sure at every inch that she would hear the noise and turn.

She continued to stand motionless, her eyes fixed outward. The hands hanging loosely at her sides were gloved in gray. The one toward him held a letter. At this sight Randy's heart went down like lead. Of course it was from some "fellow." A girl like that would have admirers by the score.

His chastened steps reached her without betrayal. He was at her side, the tan hat lifted, before she recognized the presence of an intruder. It gave him a little stab of pain to note that she had instinctively drawn back.

But now the smiles sparkled. She ran to him, her hand outstretched. "Oh! it is you!" she cried, with a note of joy that thrilled him. "I am so very glad!"

He took the little hand, holding it close. "Now at last I can really 'ax you howdy,'" he responded warmly.

"Don't." She checked him with a short sob. "I'm deathly homesick already. This — this" — she lifted the opened letter — "has just come from Grandma." She drew the other hand from his and began searching for her handkerchief. "Don't mind if I cry a little more," she begged. "They really are happy tears."

His keen glance had detected signs of weeping, and he had burned with new hatred of the one who had

written words to cause her grief. After all, it was only "Grandma." The reaction made him quite light-headed. How joyously the Vyver ducks quacked all at once!

"It wasn't only the letter, but this came in it," she went on tremulously, unfolding a small but exquisite collar of rosepoint. "It was grandma's — and my mother wore it, too."

"There is something in the folds," said Randy, not daring to touch the fragile strands.

"That is what really made me cry," the girl whispered. Her eyes brimmed, and to hide it she bent over, pressing her lips to the withered flower.

"It is just a rose, a little cinnamon rose — from — from —" The voice died in a sob. It could not utter the name of that sacred garden-spot.

"I think I know," said Randy, swallowing hard. "And what a lovely thought to send it for your birthday, yesterday."

"Yes! You — remembered?"

"Did you expect me to forget?" he retorted almost brusquely. "Look here." He lifted the watch fob. His half-coin had been set in a cipher of aluminum. It looked like a very mountainous new moon in the arm of the old.

"I wear mine too, always," confessed the girl, her drooped face flushing. She put her hand to the thread-like necklace, drawing a loop outward above her collar.

Randolph was dumb; so his hope had not been presumptuous! In the strange shyness which encompassed him, he stooped for a pebble, and leaning over the water, dropped it upon the back of a hungry, expectant fowl.

The duck turned an indignant, twitching tail upon

him and sped off to the island, followed by an inquiring string of congeners.

"You mustn't do that," protested the girl, laughing but still at struggle to withhold the tears. "Yes, you did understand about the rose. But now tell me — were you at home — in your home, Culpeper, before you came over here? I want to know everything about my kindred."

"You bet I was, just before sailing, which isn't quite two weeks."

"So short a time," wondered Ariadne. "And America seems to me so far, so very far away."

"Nothing is far away these days," the traveled youth informed her. "Distance is shriveling up at such a rate that soon there won't be any."

"And I feel as if there wasn't anything else," sighed the exile. Then, as if determined to put aside repinings, she asked quickly: "What was the last you heard of Grandma and Cousin Agnes?"

"I didn't have to hear," boasted her companion. "I was at Allan Water."

"You — you came straight from my home?" she gasped. "Oh, how did it seem; and how was Grandma?"

"Just as chipper as the day you said good-by. She's a wonderful old lady! And she and Mrs. Hill have grown to be twin souls."

"This is such good, good news," sighed the girl happily. "Of course she writes cheerful letters, but she might do that anyway. It is not like hearing from somebody who has seen her with their own eyes." She looked up now to the anointed eyes, and her own were so tender and so beautiful that Randolph's heart seemed about to dissolve before their gaze.

"There's another place I went; you know," he appealed boyishly, pointing to the withered rose. "The place where it grew."

"Oh! Randy!" she breathed, and could say no more.

"The queerest thing happened to me while I was there" — it was almost as if the words were spoken against his will — "I don't know whether I am doing right to tell you, but somehow I must."

"It was just before sunset. I had left your grandmother out in the garden, near that old Judas-tree by the corner of the house — you remember?"

"Do I remember!"

"Of course, what an ass I am! Well, Grandma had given me permission to go. I held the key to the big iron gate in my hands. I went through the youpon hedge gate. You see, I'm not asking if you remember that" he flashed, with a grin that showed teeth as white as those of Anguish. "And I had just reached the bottom of the hill and was starting up the other side among the pine-needles, when — now, here's the spooky part — I heard your voice calling 'Randy'! I don't wonder that you look as if I had poured cold water over you," he laughed. "I hardly believe it myself, but I'll give you my solemn oath that it was as real, as audible, as the cry of that milk-girl yonder with her cart."

"Was it that one time only?" asked Ariadne, with lips that began to feel stiff and cold.

"No, it was just the beginning. I hurried on up the hill, calling myself a fool and a few other things. But as I unlocked the gate, you said it over — twice. It sounded as if you were in trouble and needed me."

"I went inside and sat near your mother's grave. The whole world smelled of cinnamon roses. The sun was low, and I can see now those long, yellow streaks of

light on the brick wall opposite. Of course, it was only natural that I should be thinking of you there, but somehow it wasn't thinking — it was feeling — being — Oh, how can I express it? I never had such an experience in my life! Please don't think me a beast of a coward if I admit that, at one time, my hair stood up, and I felt as if beetles were doing the 'grizzly' along my spine. For after a while it wasn't your influence I felt, though yours remained throughout the strongest — but — but I seemed to know that your father, and even the young mother who had been asleep so long, that they, too, were 'alert and aware,' trying to tell me that you needed me.

"Just then a dreadful something came into the air, or rather, the reflex of a horror — for it was you — way over here — that was fighting back the horror.

"I got up on my feet and found that my hands were clinched like this." He held up two vibrant, bronze fists. "I wanted to pitch into somebody, though I couldn't say whom. Then the worst part faded, and peace fell on the little burying-ground again. But when I started down that hill, my knees were so shaky that I thought they'd give under me at every step.

"I went back to New York in the morning, and the first piece of news handed out was that I must catch the next steamer for Europe. Now, what do you make of that for a pipe-dream?" he demanded, trying to speak lightly, though the muscles of his face still twitched.

"You said it was about two weeks ago?"

"Yes, just. Wait a minute! I can tell you the exact date. It was Wednesday, the seventh of May."

"And the hour was sunset?"

"A little before. I should say that the time was about half-past five. I didn't have enough sense left to look at my watch."

"In Holland that would be about half-past nine, wouldn't it?"

"Search me!" demurred Randolph slangily. "I haven't been on this side long enough. The sun appears to be up to some queer old tricks, though. As far as I can see, these twilights last until next morning."

"Yes, they do linger for many hours," she murmured faintly.

He looked at her sharply. "Ariadne! Dear little girl! You are shaking as if you had a chill. There, I knew I should not have told you that grewsome story. I'm a bonehead! Matteawan should be my middle name! Come, let us go over to that bench."

He stooped for the fallen letter, and taking his companion by the arm, assisted her across the few yards of distance.

For a long time both were silent. The Virginian, if one judged from his scowl, was still engaged in calling himself an idiot. What the girl beside him felt could not be fathomed. Her head was lifted, and her face was very pale, but its whiteness was translucent, hinting of radiance from a hidden shrine.

Slowly her breathing became regular, and a faint pink stole back to her cheeks.

"How did you happen to find the Vyver?" she asked in a natural voice.

"But have I found it?" the young man laughed. He was thankful to speak again on ordinary matters.

"Why, yes — didn't you know? This is the Vyver." She made a comprehensive gesture. "The water that you see is all that is left of the old Binnenhof moat."

"And what is the Binnenhof? It sounds like a beer-garden."

"It is that group of old, old buildings that you can

see rising above newer ones. I don't know its history myself, but it has been a place of Dutch government and law-making forever. Their parliament still meets in it, I believe."

"Hope they make better laws than some of ours," muttered the young advocate.

Ariadne turned serious eyes to his. "There is one thing more I want to ask you. No, not about that terrible and beautiful thing!" she interpolated quickly, as she noted the protest of his gesture. "Why was it that you had to come abroad?"

The lawyer's direct gaze did not falter, though above it his brows came together in a troubled way. "It's about a lawsuit — a pretty unsavory one, too. I mustn't talk about it until I am sure, but I can tell you this much in confidence: there's already very little doubt in my mind that the 'Levantine Mixture' is the man I'm rounding up."

"You mean Mr. Martel? About that money he has just lost in Paris!"

Randolph jumped. "What do you know about Martel and Paris?"

"Only what Donna read me from his letter," answered the girl in some confusion — his eyes were so quick and hard. "He — he — speculated or something, and must have twenty thousand dollars at once."

"You are positive that is the sum?"

"Oh, yes. Donna was in a frightful state of mind all day over it. That's what she meant last night when she referred to your being a lawyer and could give her advice."

"So that was it!" Again he pondered thoughtfully. "I'm afraid the poor woman is in for a dreadful time. But look here, Ariadne, don't let's spoil our morning



by thinking about ugly facts. Why shouldn't we have a little Dutch breakfast somewhere, all to ourselves? I'm a distant relative, you know. Not very distant at this moment, thank the Lord!" he supplemented fervently.

"We should," seconded the girl, springing to her feet. "Will you put my precious letter in your pocket? I know just the place to go."

"Lead me to it," quoth Randy, in the vocabulary of his native town.

Laughing, they rose, sauntering and pausing as young things will, beneath the flower-set branches. The greedy ducks, having recovered from the recent affront, followed to the extreme far corner of the Vyver. But for once Ariadne neither saw nor heard them.

"This is the *Plaat*," she announced, as they stepped into a small, open space. "The fishwives stop here with their wares from Scheveningen. See, there is a 'bus-load now."

"A 'bus-load!" echoed Randolph, staring. "I thought all 'busses belonged to London."

"These came from London; it must have been a century ago, to look at them."

"The horses were evidently thrown in," remarked the young man disparagingly.

"They are knock-kneed and funny, poor things," Ariadne laughed. "And this 'bus is so old it looks as if it wanted to kneel down like a camel. But just see those rosy faces under the wonderful caps. It is crowded with them inside and out. The top is a roof-garden of big white iris!"

"I can't perceive an iris fragrance," grinned Randy, as the moth-eaten vehicle staggered past.

"That is their fish-baskets," explained Ariadne, her

dimples playing. "I suppose they must get used to it in time."

"Evidently, as they still live."

She threw him a look of smiling deprecation.

"Now we go through this little arch into the Buitenhof and pass the famous prison where John van Barnevelt languished, as the guide-books say, and from which those splendid brothers, John and Cornelius de Witte, were dragged and murdered. And there," nodding her head toward a pavement shaded by trees and set with small, round tables, "there's our restaurant."

"I say! there's quite some class to this!" radiated her companion, as they took their places in a sequestered spot. "I feel that I'm going to have the breakfast of my life. I want a Dutch one — everything complete."

"Why, what's the matter!" he exclaimed, for Ariadne had given a cry of dismay, followed by laughter which proved difficult to quell.

"It's only — you — you've never seen one," she managed to articulate. "I have. You'd better let me tell you."

The young man's elbows went to the marble top. He looked puzzled and a little sheepish.

"First," she began, trying hard to appear serious, "this cozy little table would be whisked away, and a sort of platform — a carpenter's bench — dragged into its place."

"A wider table?"

"Much wider — we'd need a telephone."

"Stop there! I've heard enough."

"Then all the waiters would file out with cheeses," she went on merrily, ignoring his capitulation.

"You mean Edam Cheese, of course?"

"That's the only kind we know at home: red balloons

and pineapples. But there are dozens of varieties. Some are so brown with cinnamon it looks like snuff. Others are full of nutmeg, and caraway seed, and citron, and ginger —”

“Spare me !”

“After the cheeses come cold meats — I couldn’t look at them — they needed cooking; and fish, even more raw — great chunks of it. — and dried fish, done in pickles or a dreadful yellow sauce. Then radishes and cucumbers; after that pots of honey, thickened pear-juice, prunes, and crystallized ginger, pickled peaches — and, oh, I forgot! — a million kinds of ‘*saucijis*.’”

“What have you saved me from?” murmured the fainting youth. “I’ll order rolls and coffee.”

“Perhaps we could risk some *eieren*,” suggested his preserver.

“What’s that — a tonic?”

“No, eggs; just good, old, sho’-nuff eggs,” she dimpled. “If you chance to be an epicure, you’ll demand duck eggs.”

“I don’t chance,” rallied the chastened voice. “Not even if they were laid on that island in the Vyver.”

After the fragrant coffee had been served, and the eggs successfully decapitated, Ariadne asked her host whether he had become reconciled to living in New York.

“Reconciled! Why, I wouldn’t live in any other city, if you gave it to me with a pound of tea! Why, anybody under a hundred must feel young and energetic in that great beaker of bubbles. You don’t have time to grouch.”

“What is a grouch? I never heard that word before.”

“Oh, just New York slang!” explained Randolph

largely. "Over there you get a new phrase for each day. They are some of the bubbles. In English you would probably express it by 'repine.' But now, honest, doesn't that sound like cambric-tea beside the grippy, grinding-your-teeth word 'grouch'?"

"It does," admitted his *vis-à-vis*, smiling. "But somehow I can't think of you as grouching anywhere."

"Well," he agreed modestly, "I haven't had much cause to grouch as yet. Judge Henry got me in with a powerful firm, you know, and I've been lucky from the start."

"I'm so glad. Do you mean lucky in your profession?"

"Yes, being retained in some important cases, for instance, and having them decently reported in the papers when I had managed to pull them off. Don't think me a boaster," he pleaded, with a quizzical, boyish look. "But the last one, about a month ago, was considered so — er — so — creditable that I was taken into the firm as full member. It's a wonderful push!"

"So now you really do get cases that you can charge money for?" she laughed, recalling his boyish lament beneath the cherry-tree.

"Well, rather! But since we are talking of my unworthy self," he continued, his voice taking a more serious tone, "there's something that I want to tell you, little friend: a certain stand I have taken in law — my personal platform, so to speak — which has really been determined through your affairs — and you."

"How could your practice in that big city have anything to do with me?" she marveled.

"A lot; you just listen. My very first job, after being admitted to the Virginia Bar, was that will I drew at Allan Water."

The girl's eyes lowered.

"You saw for yourself how I felt about that." He paused, and she murmured: "Yes."

"I did my fighting best to undo it afterwards, and your Cousin Nellie was with me, heart and soul. But the others, including you yourself, were too strong for me, or rather, I should say, too passive. Anyway, the thing went through."

"There was never any other possibility, Randy."

"That's neither here nor there. I am referring now to my part in it — my hateful, reluctant part."

"I know how you felt, dear Randy," she murmured.

"Right there I said to myself: 'This is a case of never again,' and I've proved it so. From the first moment that I took up my new position, I had it clearly understood that I would never consent to plead a case or even be mixed up in one that I didn't believe to be genuine and in the right. My senior partners winked at each other. They roared when I got out of the room; I heard them! I suppose I must have seemed a conceited, priggish young tar-heel from the piney woods. Of course they promised. They never had an idea that I'd stick to it. But I have!" His lean, brown jaws came together with a click.

Ariadne's eyes flashed righteousness into his.

"You always will, too!" she cried with a note of triumph.

A beautiful smile relaxed the steely spring of his mouth. For one instant he rested his bare hand on hers.

"The funniest thing of all," he went on, now almost jocosely, "is that the old boys keep up their pretense of laughing at what they call my ante-bellum scruples, but any one can see that they are as pleased as Punch.

The newspapers cartoon me as 'Sir Galahad of the Bar.' You can imagine — or rather you can't — the sort of 'bar' that is shown in their absurd pictures: bottles, and mirrors, and a brass foot-rail," he elaborated vaguely.

"They make fun of you in papers! They dare to!" she cried indignantly.

"Oh, I don't mind!" he laughed. "It is all bully advertising, and it lets the public know just where I stand."

As he talked, the girl's eager face shifted and quivered like the rose-opal to which Cousin Nellie had once likened it. She drank in breathlessly not only the impassioned words, but every look of him. She did not lose a single utterance; her eyes were a mirror to his varying intonations. Yet underneath this mental apprehension ran little ecstatic phrases of self-uttered thoughts:

"He is Virginia — with its clear, bright air and health-giving forests. He is an October day — a young October day, with the coloring of autumn in his eyes and cheeks and hair. He is the brown, swift creek at Allan Water, with its golden sand beneath. I knew he would be clean and good and wonderful! Oh, I am glad that he is here! Even when we must part, I shall have this beautiful new memory. He is a piece of home!"

"That ends my oration for the day!" He broke off somewhat abruptly. "I didn't intend to inflict you at quite such length. You will see what my opposing lawyers mean when they say that once get me started, I am liable to talk the arm off the Statue of Liberty.

"Now, Ariadne, tell me something about your own life. That is really what I came for. I had fully determined to sail, even before this business matter turned

up. What have you been doing with yourself all these centuries you have been away?"

"Chiefly packing and unpacking; getting on trains and getting off of them. It is not half so exciting as being caricatured," she answered, with a little *moue*.

"You must have seen a lot of the world," Randolph mused. "I envy you that part. But your special interests, your personal friends? I suppose you hardly stop long enough anywhere to make them?"

"Indeed I do. Oh, I have lots and lots of friends!" she exulted.

"Really? Are any of them here at the Hague?"

"Only one — as yet."

"And who is he, if I may ask?"

Ariadne controlled her face with difficulty. "He is the *portier's* little granddaughter, Betje, who is now giving me lessons in Dutch."

"Oh!" grinned Randy. "Are the others kids, too?"

"They are undersized angels, if that is what you mean by kids!" she flung at him. "Dear, precious, little peasant children of a half-dozen different nationalities: Swiss, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Belgian, and Dutch. It does sound ridiculous, but I have forty-one correspondents, all under ten years old. Some are so tiny that their mothers have to write for them. Betje will make forty-two. It is the children who taught me languages. I had to learn, you know, so I could answer their letters."

"Good heavens! What have I struck? Seven languages!" whistled the young man, pretending to move his chair back in alarm.

"No, only four," she sparkled. "You see, French does for Belgium and Lower Switzerland. If I ever

accomplish Dutch, which doesn't seem very likely, that will be just five."

"That's leaving out English, Nigger, and American. The last two are my limit," he deplored.

The girl laughed gayly. "I must show you some of my treasures: the dearest, quaintest, most unbelievable little letters. I wouldn't give a single one for the biggest diamond that ever shone."

"I can see that in your face."

"And that's not all," she went on, lured into confidence by the tender interest in his watching eyes. "I send a little present to each one at Christmas. This is my one great pleasure. Already I have begun dressing dolls. Often they are poor, cheap, little toys; but my friends are all poor, too, so they don't mind."

"What do you mean by not having spending money? Your father's income must be enormous."

"I — I — don't know," she hesitated. "My stepmother sometimes remembers to give me a little, but often she forgets. I never ask her."

The lawyer had flushed darkly. "I don't understand," he persisted. "Even in that will, which I thought pernicious, it was expressly stipulated that as long as you were with that — with your stepmother, the income was to be equally divided."

"Donna doesn't look at it that way, I think." The words were spoken without resentment. She stated this as she might any other ordinary fact.

Randolph, unseen, clutched a table-leg. His very eyes burned with indignation, but he warned himself that this was not the time to give it full expression. "How have you endured seven years with those two people?" he allowed himself.

"You mustn't ask me, Randy. I don't know what to say."



"But I must, dear. You know it is because I care. Are they actively disagreeable or unkind?"

"No — no. Donna is really fond of me."

He gave a harsh laugh. "She has a queer way of showing it! But the man, Martel? I've never seen him, but I know a few choice things. He isn't fit to breathe the air with you."

The girl's eyes fell. In her nervousness she began putting on her gloves, tugging at them desperately. Carr watched her keenly. He struck the table with his open palm. "You hate that man, Ariadne!" he blazed. "That's not the worst; you fear him. Isn't it true? You must tell me."

"I cannot. Let us go back. Donna may be up, asking for me. She is not well."

"Just one moment. I don't need to question further about him. In all this time have you never wished, or attempted to get away from them, to make a visit to your home?"

"Oh, yes. It was only yesterday that I tried. I went to Donna, almost beseeching her —" She stopped, confused.

"Well?" he said sternly.

The girl did not dare to look at him. "She — she said it would cost too much."

Carr leaped to his feet. His long body shuddered. "Yes, we had better go," he ground out between clinched teeth. "I shall say something that I shouldn't, if we stay."

He strode off, scowling at the stones before him. Ariadne found it difficult to keep pace.

"Randy!" she panted out at last, "don't walk so fast. And don't — oh, please — please don't keep on looking murderous. It doesn't matter about me. We have had such a lovely morning until now."

He caught himself together, and looking down into her troubled, pleading face, his own softened. "I am a brute," he said contritely. "Forgive me, little friend."

They had passed, by this, under the great, medieval gateway to the Binnenhof, threading by smaller arches into a long row of cloisters, now lined with second-hand bookstalls and little booths of antiques.

"That grim, square building in the middle is called the 'Hall of the Knights'; you can only get in on Thursdays," Ariadne stated, anxious to prevent her companion's relapse into scowl-producing thought.

"Be careful! Here's a car," she warned suddenly, and with the cry seized him by the arm. Side by side they flattened themselves to an incredible thinness against a wall of the narrow arch.

"It's an outrage to let those things loose in here!" the man flared out angrily. But when Ariadne murmured in an awestruck, childish voice: "Suppose we had been fat?" he threw his head back and laughed until the cobbled courtyard reverberated.

Well pleased that the gloom was shattered, Ariadne literally danced out into the quiet street. "Oh! there's the gate; it is open!" she sang joyously.

Randolph looked inquiringly from left to right. "What gate? I can't see anything but brick arches."

"Here on the sidewalk just before us. That iron one with spikes? The old house is the Mauritshaus; I wonder if I dare take the time to show you a beloved friend?"

"A friend? Surely the *portier's* grandchild doesn't live in there!" he observed suspiciously.

"I must have forgotten this one for the moment," replied Ariadne, with lamb-like meekness; then, at his

sudden look, was forced to turn her naughty, dimpled face away.

As she passed through the black portals, the old guard touched his cap.

"I come here so often that they have begun to know me," she explained, with a nonchalant wave of the hand.

Randy did not seem pleased.

"This place was built ages and ages ago by Prince Maurice of Nassau for a hunting lodge," the childlike voice went on.

She hurried up the stone steps, again nodding to official salutations, and within doors sped with familiar directness to the upper floor. Her companion had begun to lag. Ignoring him, she flew on, never pausing, until in a far corner she came to a dramatic pause. Her hands fell empty to her sides, she drew a long, deep sigh of assured delight, and slowly raised her eyes to a single canvas.

The young man had advanced and now stood behind her.

"That is my little friend, up there. I come here almost every day to talk with her. Sometimes I think she knows and watches for me. I want her to know you, too."

Randolph did not attempt to speak; they stood together looking.

The wistful face of the painting gazed a little to the right of them, as if at that very instant some one beyond had spoken.

It was a girl's face, a thing built up of immortal radiance. The adoring, lifted eyes of the earthly maiden were not more luminous.

"I love it better than all other pictures," the soft,

earthly voice caressed. "Not, as I should, because its art is supreme, but for its human girlhood, its pathos, and its wondering innocence. She was only a little milkmaid from one of the farms about the town of Delft, where her great creator Vermeer lived and died. Grandma would say at once that she was not of gentle birth, but what does birth matter to a spirit that will never die?"

She held her arms out, smiling.

Randolph breathed hard as if he had been running. "She's got us beaten, Ariadne! When you and I have turned back to Virginia clay, that little girl will still be looking past us, wondering. Thank you, my dear, for thinking me worthy to stand with you before her."

Without self-consciousness, he lifted Ariadne's hand to his lips. She pressed his fingers warmly. As they turned at last, their hands did not separate. They went out softly, like two quiet children, into a day which for all its sunshine seemed just at first an unreality.

When they had reached the corner of the Tournooiveld, the girl, looking toward the Doelen, cried out: "I do believe that's Donna sitting in the sun. I'm certain that's her pink parasol!"

This proved to be the case. Even more gratifying, not to say unusual, it was Donna cheerful and oblivious of personal vexations.

"Oh! you naughty children; I've caught you!" She greeted them playfully, peering at them around the edge of her rose-colored shade. "Now come, 'fess up; what mischief have you been planning?"

"Among other things, a little trip over to Haarlem after luncheon," confessed Randolph, with sagacious pulchritude. "That is, if you consent to go with us. I want to see what's left of those wide stretches of tulips

and hyacinths that make the Dutch post-cards look like a kid's paint-box."

"I think it would be lovely," consented the chaperon. "We don't want to start too early, for the sun is warm. We might stop over there for dinner. I've heard of a Haarlem hotel where one can get seraphic food."

"Me for the Seraph Inn!" laughed Randy. "There's a moon to-night. The drive back will be marvelous!"

And it was a marvel that came true. Reality, for this once, at least, outstripped each phase of promise. At times Ariadne furtively pinched herself just where her glove stopped. It was so much like a fairy tale that might change at any instant into rainbows. They did not reach "Den Haag" until nearly midnight.

In parting, Ariadne whispered: "Randy, it's been the happiest day of all my life!"

His strong hands threatened to mangle hers as he murmured: "Shall it be again the morning for us — Ariadne of Allan Water?"

Her eyes said Yes even before the quick nod of assent. Wrenching her tingling fingers from his grasp, she ran up to her room and all the way her young heart sang: "The morning — in the morning."

## CHAPTER IV

THAT night it was Ariadne who could not sleep, but her soft, Dutch bed, instead of being a gridiron, became a perfumed barge on which she drifted with no guidance but dear, half-remembered moments of the day.

At times she was gliding on the stream of Allan Water. White titi trees leaned down, and great, white butterflies like iris, or Dutch caps, poised in the mid-air of her reverie. Or she moved slowly on a narrower tide along one of the bright canals that cut, like a scissor-blade, into the glowing tapestry of tulip fields near Haarlem. Again, as sleep drew nearer, she was upon the still, blue waters of no earthly sea.

Here, by just bending to the crystal surface, there appeared slow, phosphorescent wavings, piled rocks the hue of beryl, fringed with silver moss, strange, breathing sea-anemones, and moving forms that would have risen had she dared to beckon them.

Under the spell of fantasy, her small couch flowered into an Eastern galley. She heard the silken swish of draperies and knew when the soundless oars dipped. Oh, for a song to voice this languorous happiness :

“My heart is like a singing bird  
Whose nest is in a watered shoot,  
My heart is like an apple tree  
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit,  
My heart is like a rainbow shell  
That paddles in a halcyon sea —”

How the words swayed and soothed her ! Surely the poem was wrought for her and for this hour !

“My heart is gladder than all these,  
Because my love —”

Sleep, newly startled, dropped her starry wand. Enchantment wavered. The dreamer, caught back to earth, pressed a hot cheek into her pillow.

“Of course, I didn’t mean love !” she told that drowsy, smiling Other Girl severely. “It is no silly love, but a real, true glorious friendship that is making me so happy !”

The Other Girl nodded and let her white lids droop.

“Raise me a dais of silk and down ;  
Hang it with fair and purple dyes ;  
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
And peacocks with a hundred eyes ;  
Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
In leaves and silver *fleurs-de-lys* ;  
Because the birthday of my life  
Is come, my love is come to me.”

Now she sat up rigidly. “This sort of thing won’t do at all, you know !” she remarked aloud. Rising, she went over to the window. There were several all-night arc-lights hanging in the Tournooiveld. Under the shadow of every tree she saw a tan-clad, broad-shouldered figure looking up at her. She laughed a little hysterically. The night air was cold and had a restorative effect. After a while she got back into bed. Now she forced herself to think only of practical things : the dress she intended to put on in the morning, and just where she and Randy should walk. It must be the Bosch, that quiet wood which in the midst of the busy, little Dutch capital is indeed “a green thought in a green

shade." She had begun to picture the very way in which the rich tones of Randolph's face would gleam against sylvan shadows, when a sound from the corridor drew her erect and tense, listening, with that almost superhuman sensitiveness that belongs to the night's deep hours.

She had no idea of the time ; that had been a detail too insignificant, but it was certainly very late. She heard footsteps — intelligent, stealthy footsteps. They had paused outside her door. "Thank heaven that I bolted it!" came as a reassuring thought.

Who could it be who wished to listen at her door? Her very breathing was suspended. There was something that lived out there, something that stooped, holding its breath as she was holding hers. Now it had turned and was moving from her with feet softly-shod, furtive, and on tip-toe. But for the fact of his being absent, she would have said it was the valet François.

Yet even if he were in the hotel, why should he care to know whether or not she slept? She lay awake for a long time, but the sinister footsteps did not return. Finally, worn out with conjecture, she fell asleep ; and with the first rays of the welcomed sun, the recollection, together with her fears, fled among other shades of night.

As she dressed, little refrains of the birthday lyric danced back to her mind. She smiled and shook her head at them, but they only flashed their iridescent wings and fluttered a little farther off.

It must be nearly seven o'clock by this — she had learned the exact moment when Peetje played Moses to the sparrows and when the old *portier* lighted his Napoleonic cigar. She peeped from her window, sure of seeing them, but at the first look drew back, for a very different



figure had just joined them, and now bent broad and courteous shoulders at the *portier's* side.

She stood quiet, surprised and a little frightened at the way her pulses throbbed, then, putting on her hat, flew down the stairs and out into the sun.

"Ah, there you are!" cried Randolph joyously, and strode with long legs toward her. The *portier* and his dog followed at a less tempestuous rate of speed.

"I was just telling the *portier* that you and I knew each other as children at home," said the Virginian, taking Ariadne's hand in a brotherly fashion.

"Indeed we did," she echoed heartily, then turned to the little *portier* and smiled. "He is the very best friend I have in all the world."

At this moment a lithe shadow passed out from the hotel and came to a pause before Ariadne. "You are to go to Madame's room at once," he announced.

Randolph took a single stride. "What do you mean by speaking in that tone to Miss Skipwith?" he demanded, in a voice that made the servant shrink.

"Pardon," he muttered, bowing with exaggerated humility. "I was in haste. I did not think."

"Well, think next time," warned Carr threateningly, his fingers twitching.

Ariadne had gone white to the eyelashes. "Never mind, Randy," she interposed. "He probably repeated the message as it was given. Is my stepmother ill, François?"

The valet's incipient shrug changed, at a low exclamation from Randolph, into a sort of cringe.

"I know nothing, Mademoiselle, except that Madame desires to see you instantly."

As Ariadne sped indoors, Carr put up a hand to check the valet's accompanying flight.

"Look here ! Is that the way you have been allowed to address Miss Skipwith ?"

"No harm was meant, Monsieur," the man reiterated, kneading his pale, yellowish hands together. "It was but my zeal to reach Mademoiselle before she should go." He darted away on the last word, the American's angry eyes following.

Old Machem, the dog, had retreated a few yards, and sat there snarling, and giving vent to low, disapproving growls. Now she trotted back to her master, fawning about his feet.

"He is a bad one, dat François," grunted the *portier*, shaking his gray head. "De master, mademoiselle's stepfader, and dis valet, dey arrive last night, and madame is still to Haarlem. Monsieur was anger, Gott ! de cursing an' de langvidge from his apartment you never heered !" The old man clasped his hands and rolled his eyes upward at the memory. "And after dat, when monsieur was again smooth, the valet he began to creep, and whisper among our *domestiques*, wid de question, de bribe of coins — de — de — insinuate — It is mos' sad dat so angel a mademoiselle as Miss Skeepvitt must haf concern wid doze mans."

So long a speech from the little *portier* was unusual. For the most part his acquired languages were spurred only to short, grammatical flights, but no inaccuracies or lapses into Dutch consonants could hide his deep sincerity.

"Mr. Martel is the husband of Miss Skipwith's step-mother only," explained Carr, as to an equal. "There is no blood relationship, I'm glad to say."

He walked back slowly into the hotel. The morning's walk was, he knew, already a forfeited joy. He frowned, not only because of the disappointment, but in an

attempt to apprehend the cause of such violent anger on Martel's part, and the valet's subsequent activities as a spy. The mere fact of Mrs. Martel's temporary absence could scarcely account for it.

At the top of the first short flight of steps he hesitated. He did not wish to go back to his disordered room. On the other hand, the hour was a little early for breakfasting, even had he the desire. Glancing into the lounge, he saw the large center table strewn with newspapers. The room was apparently empty.

He strolled in, but before he had reached the table became aware of a figure, which, rising from a sequestered chair, now slowly drew near.

"The Levantine Mixture," he thought. Ignoring the other's approach, young Carr continued his progress toward the table. At the corner of it, the two came face to face.

Martel was not a short man, but standing before the American he needed to lift his long, fringed lids.

"Your name is Carr, I believe?" the low, beautifully modulated voice began, tentatively, "of — er — pardon, but I find those Western States confusing."

"I am Mr. Carr. What business can you have with me?"

"Shall we be seated, Mr. Carr?" suggested the voice, as the graceful figure turned slightly in the direction of a group of empty chairs. For the present the lounge held no other guests.

"Thanks, I prefer to stand."

Martel gave a small gesture of resignation. "My 'business,' as you put it, is brief. I fear you may not find it altogether to your liking."

"I am listening."

"My name is Martel," stated the other, with an imperceptible heightening of manner.

"Even if that is a fact, it fails to interest me," observed Randolph, his eyes fixed steadily on the man's face.

Martel's long lashes flickered. To recover poise, he drew out his jeweled case, and extracting a cigarette, held it, unlighted, in the fingers of his right hand.

"I do not wish to be altogether discourteous," he now resumed, with his accustomed languid ease of manner, "and you may have transgressed through ignorance."

Now he lighted the white tube, taking quite a time over the ceremony, as if wishing these preliminary words to be given full effect. The young lawyer's eyes did not move from his.

"But even so — " Martel supplemented, as if regretting this necessity of correction. "I am afraid that you owe me an apology, Mr. Carr." The heavy lids rose suddenly, but not the slightest change had passed across the Virginian's countenance.

After waiting in vain for a reply, Martel went on: "I see that I shall have to speak even more plainly. If you can understand nothing else, Mr. Carr — " He gave a little shrug and a resigned sigh. "Your conduct yesterday, the advantage you took of my absence, is inexcusable. I do not consider you a desirable acquaintance for the ladies of my family."

"No?" questioned Randolph, in a sort of hurt surprise. His mouth gave one spasmodic twitch, and he needed to bite his inner lip to hold back a grin of appreciation, the Oriental's acting was so good.

"And who, if I may inquire, do you consider the ladies of your family?"

For the first time a flush mounted to Martel's cheek. "That is a deliberate impertinence, Mr. Carr. You are entirely aware that I refer to my wife, Mrs. Martel, and stepdaughter, Miss Skipwith."

"I recognize — Miss Skipwith," Randolph murmured. Now it was he who lighted a cigarette, taking one from a humble paper package and igniting it with a leisurely enjoyment that equaled Martel's. His young face was bland and it would seem just a little perplexed.

Martel felt himself losing ground.

"I do not choose to fence with you," he retorted. "All you need to understand is that I forbid any further attempt on your part to hold intercourse either with my two women or myself." He turned on his heel — every curve of his pliant body expressing contempt and dismissal.

The lawyer made no effort at detention. He smoked placidly, and, still standing, lifted the newly arrived Paris edition of the *New York Herald*.

Martel hesitated. If he went now, it could be with no assurance of success, yet to turn back betrayed a more obvious defeat. Suddenly he wheeled back to his enemy, hot with an impulse to strike the insulting paper down. His delicate hand was lifted.

Randolph's next words though low, were very crisp and clear.

"Don't you think it about time to call that bluff off?"

The other's eyes gleamed angrily.

"What do you mean?" he cried. Then, with a quick glance around: "We will continue this discussion in a more private place."

"Oh, no, we won't," contradicted the American pleasantly. "I've got all that I want right now."

"This is intolerable!" said Martel, whose face had gone ashen. "I refuse to listen to your cowardly insinuation."

The Paris *Herald* was laid back softly. The young

lawyer lifted eyes that were now bright with amusement and a certain triumph.

Martel had placed one hand upon the table, pressing until the finger tips were flattened. The younger man appeared all at once to realize his entire presence. It was still a gallant front; from the gray-spatted English boots to the parting of the sleek, black hair, each inch of him was perfect. Almost it seemed regrettable that the semblance must be pricked.

"I — I — insist upon knowing what you mean by 'bluff,'" Martel challenged like a creature self-driven to destruction.

Randolph Carr abandoned his light tone:

"Your business in California must have accustomed you to this and similar terms, I think." The words came like blows. "As for your trying it on with me —" He paused. "I am junior member of the firm of Harman, Brown, and Company of New York. That's all for the present, Mr. Constantine Patredis of Adrianople."

With face deliberately averted, Carr waited until the other had disappeared. He stood a little longer, thinking heavily. Then came a decisive gesture, and crossing to a small, open desk he wrote and sealed a hasty note. This he gave, with special instructions, to a hotel servant, and then, oblivious of the fact that he had not yet breakfasted, mounted to his room and began flinging things into a dressing case.

At the moment of Randolph's encounter with Martel in the lounge, Ariadne, on an upper landing, having knocked for the third time at her stepmother's door, entered cautiously, to be greeted by a sound of hysterical, stifled sobs. Her young lungs, so recently filled with

bright, morning air, sickened a little at the stale scent of violet powder and lavender.

All the windows were close drawn. At first she could see nothing; she knew of course that the moans came from Mrs. Martel, who was in bed, and gropingly she made her way in that direction.

"Oh, Donna, what can have happened?" she entreated. "Are you very ill?"

"It's a wonder I'm not d-d-dead," wailed the voice from the bedclothes. The tone held a cadence which said that it was entirely the stepdaughter's fault.

"May I not open a window, Donna? This close air of itself is enough to give you a headache."

"Yes — not that one," she commanded shrilly. "The glare would strike directly into my eyes. The farthest one — down there, by the clothes-tree."

Even at that distance, Mrs. Martel as the light streamed in, cowered and drew the sheet up to her face. At Ariadne's approach she slowly lowered it.

"Don't stand there like a bean-pole. It hurts my neck to look up at you. Sit on the bed."

"You have not told me yet —" the troubled young voice began; Mrs. Martel broke through it.

"I never lived through such a night!" she exclaimed. "Connie was like a maniac! The things he said! He wanted to put all the blame on poor me."

"But blame for what?"

"For allowing that young Carr to speak to us — and going on a long drive with him afterwards."

She put her fat hands down beside her, trying to push herself upward. Ariadne sprang to her feet and assisted.

"There! that's much better," said the stepmother, panting heavily from the effort.

"Oh, why did we do it, Ariadne?" she went on. "We

should remember that women over here don't go about with every stranger they can pick up. Connie says we have disgraced him and ourselves at the Hague. I never saw him so infuriated. I do believe he is jealous of me with that boy."

At this thought, a fatuously pleased expression overspread her countenance.

"Mr. Martel must be out of his senses," Ariadne replied, in a cold and restrained voice. "Mr. Carr is no stranger."

"That's what I told him, but it only made him angrier. He says that Randolph Carr is not the sort of man that decent women should know. Connie has been making inquiries. We are neither of us to speak to him again."

The girl said nothing. Mrs. Martel, peering up at her, repeated querulously: "Did you hear me, Ariadne? We are not to speak to him or notice him again."

Still Ariadne fought for self-control and silence. Donna was not a pretty sight as she leaned forward, her much be-ribboned boudoir cap over one ear, her pale and watery eyes trying to flash forth righteous indignation.

"Oh, I must get away for a while — I can't endure it — I will ask Randy to help me!" Ariadne was saying to herself.

"Don't set your face like a stone when I am talking," cried the stepmother. "You've never acted like this before."

"There never was any need of it before," said Ariadne.

At the quiet, clear words, and the tone in which they were spoken, Mrs. Martel sat gasping. Could this be Ariadne, the meek, submissive, uncomplaining Ariadne! "You must be losing your mind!" the elder woman cried when she could speak at all. "Connie is right.



"That man is trying to turn you against us. He's just a spy — that's what he is!"

"You don't think it, Donna, even though Mr. Martel has told you to pretend it."

"Indeed I do think it. I know it," defended the stepmother angrily. "He has influenced you terribly already. What he is after is to get hold of your father's money!"

Ariadne sat like a carven image.

"You wicked girl!" Mrs. Martel almost screamed. She was getting beside herself with anger and the deepening touch of fear. "You are wicked to him as well as to me. You know perfectly well you cannot marry him, or any other man."

The door-handle had turned very softly. Neither of the two had noticed it. Again it became motionless, only that the light, curving around its shining brass surface from a distant window, seemed to throb and glitter strangely.

"I don't suppose that even Randolph Carr can persuade you to break a promise made to your dying father," added Mrs. Martel vindictively.

At this the girl's head drooped. The watching woman among the pillows exulted to see how the young lids had begun to quiver.

"No one can persuade me to do that, Madonna," she returned in a low voice. "I am not going to give you up. I shall still keep faith with you and my father. But just lately things have happened that I can't tell even you — things that have changed —"

But she was allowed to go no further. Donna almost hurled herself along the bed, clutching at Ariadne's arm. "Don't dare to sit there talking about a change. Nothing can change the fact that you swore never to give me

up, that it is stated in the will, and that Connie and I will be left penniless if you do? Who's that at the door?" she called sharply. Both women listened. There was no sound at all. Mrs. Martel crept back to her pillows.

"I was sure I heard something strike against the door just then," she said, with a frightened look. "It must be my nerves. This dreadful scene has left me as weak as a cat."

"I think I'll go back to my room now, Donna," said the girl.

"Perhaps you'd better. You have done harm enough for one day," rejoined the other bitterly. "Just push that button for Cummins as you go."

Ariadne hurried around the foot of the bed, already savoring her respite. As her hand lifted to the electric bell, another sound at the door, this time an unmistakable knock, sent her toward it.

The rosy face of Peetje smiled up at her. "For Mees Skeepvitt," he announced, offering a small, silver tray on which appeared a letter.

"What is it? A note for me from Connie?" questioned Mrs. Martel.

"No, it is mine," said the girl, annoyed to feel the crimson rising into her face.

"Well, open it. Don't stand there all day," adjured the stepmother querulously. "It may be something to help out our difficulties."

After a struggle the girl, realizing that it was wiser to yield, drew out a hatpin and slit the upper edge carefully.

"My dear," it began (after the dating, May 24th) I am leaving the Hague at once, and wish it to appear as a permanent move. In reality I shall not be far, and hope to return next Tuesday at latest, and may have startling

news. In the meantime, keep on your guard, and be extremely careful, for my sake as much as your own. You will understand.

“RANDY.

“P.S. You said last night, that it had been a happy day for you. I shall carry it like a banner in the sun for the rest of my life. R.”

“Well, well,” exclaimed Donna. “Who is it from? What do they say?”

“It is from Mr. Carr. He is leaving here at once.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mrs. Martel. “Connie has been giving him a talking to.” She glowed with reflected virtue.

Ariadne got from the room at last. The letter was a comfort, but the tangled lines of Fate seemed pulling and chafing about her all at once. She could not lift the lightest wing of hope, but some new fetter strained.

At the steep, upper stairway she began the ascent with such a dragging heaviness that her feet might suddenly have become twin grandmothers to the twinkling pair that had flown down and along these very steps only an hour ago.

Donna was right: she had nothing to do with happiness; she would be wicked to let him hope it, even were she sure he wished it. No matter what spell he wove around her with his eloquent words, his pleading, eager face, there was a ghostly manacle no living hand could break. The binding chains might give a little, Randy’s bright eyes might search out flaws in every link; but the dull, iron ring was still around her heart, encysted, a part of its living tissue.

## CHAPTER V

MRS. MARTEL'S long morning toilet at last approached completion. Her faded hair, wound by the maid's deft fingers into many substantial-looking puffs, rose in a curved crescendo. Her hands had been manicured, and a fine dust of rice-powder coaxed into the somewhat oily skin.

The mistress, placing both elbows on her dressing-table, gazed complacently at this handiwork.

"I think I am looking better to-day, Cummins, decidedly better."

"It was what I 'ave been thinking myself, Madame," agreed the servant, as she stooped for a fallen comb. "Your heyes are not so bag-like, either."

Mrs. Martel surveyed the "bags" dispassionately. "Has the *portier*, or any one down-stairs received a wire or message from Mr. Martel?"

"I couldn't say, Madame," was the answer, supplemented by the slightly familiar observation "seeing as I've been in here with you for two hours gone."

"That's enough; bring me a dress, Cummins," rebuked Mrs. Martel.

"Which gown is it to be, Madame?"

"That new pongee, with the brown and lavender embroidery. My complexion can stand those colors to-day; besides, you can get me into it mostly sitting down."

As the chosen garment was being adjusted, Mrs. Martel, taking up an amethyst necklace by the unfastened ends, held it tentatively against her throat. "Connie said that he might get back this morning," she murmured, speaking more to herself and the necklace than to Cummins.

A knock came to her door. "*Entrez*," called Donna, without excitement, scarcely expecting to see her husband, for the rap had been crisp and sharp. But it was he, smiling and so immaculate it seemed impossible that he could have just quitted a train.

"Oh, Connie!" she welcomed, wheeling around to him. "When did you arrive?"

"This minute, by motor."

"How very nice! Hurry, Cummins. Just get that waistband together and I can do the rest of the hooks. Won't you sit down, darling?" This smiling request, being obviously intended for her husband, was answered by him with a slight negative.

"Did you get through with what took you to Rotterdam?" she persisted, beaming.

"Perfectly. The trip was a complete success."

"Not the mon —" she had struck in, when a warning nod of his head toward the maid brought abrupt silence.

"There, she is gone at last, thank goodness!" exclaimed the lady, as the door closed decorously on Cummins' common sense English heels. "Now we can talk!"

"Not in here," said the man. "We will go into the sitting-room. This is disgustingly stuffy. Pah! Come, my dear."

She followed meekly. He closed the door as she passed through and motioned to a chair into which she sank obediently, her upturned face moving slowly in whichever direction he chanced to go. Now he paused beside

a heavy center-table, and striking one of the magenta-colored hotel matches upon its small, brass-bound box, lighted the inevitable cigarette. With eyelids closed against the sulphurous glare, and lips that held the white fragment of tobacco, he mumbled: "How has your stepdaughter been behaving?"

Mrs. Martel prefaced her answer by an audible sigh. "About as usual, except that she turns into an iceberg if I try to talk about that man Carr."

"Can't discuss him, too sacred and all that," Martel laughed mockingly. "Doesn't she resent his having left her?"

"She doesn't seem to. That ridiculous child of the *portier's* was here most of yesterday, after you went. For a person who claims to be a Virginia aristocrat, Ariadne has some extremely queer tastes. You know how foolish she has always been about peasant children."

The man seated himself indolently upon the edge of the table. "If the girl is both cheerful and secretive, you may be sure that she doesn't consider this *affaire de cœur* at an end," he observed.

"But it must be at an end, Connie. I think I made that plain. I didn't mince matters, I assure you."

"And what do you feel that you have accomplished?" The question was gentle, but, like his laugh, it had the touch of a sneer.

Mrs. Martel began to fidget, picking at the embroidered cuff of one sleeve. "I can't be certain. In fact —" she burst out with more vehemence, "I don't know what to make of her at all. She becomes a changed creature if I try to say another word, and she looks at me as if I were an — an — insect! You must help me, Connie. I'm at my wit's end!"

"Certainly, my dear. That is my husbandly preroga-

tive. But after all," he suggested delicately, "Ariadne is of age, and if she wishes to marry —" he finished with a gesture.

"But she can't marry. That's just the point. She knows she is pledged —" The words broke suddenly.

"Pledged to what? That's rather an extraordinary thing to say. I'm afraid I do not understand," he drawled, as he leaned over to flick off an ash.

His wife's eyes fell. The pendulous face was becoming the color of old wax. She caught in her breath as if at a sudden terror. "It's something about her father's will. I — I told you it was unusual. He was so devoted to me that he wanted to be sure I would never be lonely —"

"Yes, I've had a few such maundering hints before," he interrupted, but still in a tone of pleasantry. From the beginning of the interview he had assumed the pose of light indifference; each movement was suave, unhasting, and full of his peculiar, Oriental grace, but from under the long, fringed lids his eyes had watched with the cold glitter and intelligence of a snake. "If now I am to help you, as you seem to wish, it is necessary for me to know facts as they are."

"Yes, darling, I can see that," she answered beseechingly. "Ariadne can't get married because of a promise she made her dying father."

"A promise she made?" repeated Martel, as if in surprise. His underlids tightened. For the first time a hint of cruelty came into his face. "Until now I have always been told that it was your promise to my fortunate predecessor that made this touching bond between you and his daughter. You said repeatedly that she would be a beggar if we turned her adrift. Is it not so?" Mrs. Martel's face sagged lower. She quivered as with physical fear and began to move her elaborately-

dressed head from side to side. "Of course, that's true — in a way —" she began hesitatingly, "but there is more of it. Oh! Connie," she cried desperately, fawning up at him, "I'm afraid I haven't been entirely straightforward. Ariadne has always said you ought to have been told the truth. Oh, Connie, you know how I love you — how I think of nothing but you."

"Let us dispense with the tremolo," said the man. "I've known all along that you were hiding something. Suppose you tell me now."

In broken, disjointed words, with many irrelevant outbursts of self-blame and appeals to his forgiveness, she told him at last their full dependence upon the young girl's loyalty. In finishing, she covered her face, sobbing out that she had withheld nothing, and praying that he would not be too hard upon her for the past years of deception.

Martel's expression had not changed by the flicker of an eyelash. Indeed, at times he scarcely seemed to be listening, being intent upon more vital thoughts within. She heard him move down from the table.

"Oh, Connie — dear, darling Connie — I cannot bear your silence. Say something — anything! Tell me you don't hate me!" He eluded her outstretched arms by an inch.

"That must depend on what you are willing to do to get us out of it," he said cryptically. "I must think now." Suddenly he threw his head back, laughing.

The woman cowered again. "Don't laugh like that! It is too horrible!" she shuddered.

"Not at all. The mirth is genuine. I was only reflecting how true it is that we sometimes build better than we know."

"I — I — don't understand," she whimpered.



"You will in a moment. No, stay where you are."

She kept her face in her hands, listening to his long, slow step as he paced the length of the room. Twice he passed her. Her very soul held out its arms to him, but her body dared not move. At the third return he came to a standstill.

"You have been rather seedy of late. Don't you think a drive would do you good?" he asked.

For a moment she could only stare. She had expected any tone but this. "Why — yes. Of course it would," she managed to stammer at last.

"To be candid, I am not thinking of you alone," he explained. "This is part of a plan already formed. I presume, under the circumstances," he added, with a curious look from under the long lashes, "I do not take too much for granted in believing that you will be glad to follow my instructions."

"Oh, Connie. Don't be cruel! You know I will do anything — anything on earth you say."

"It is not for our own sakes merely, understand that, Donna! I feel that we must take drastic steps to counteract Ariadne's imprudence. She has already seriously compromised herself and us here at the Hague!"

Donna's eyes drooped for shame.

"This man Carr is not the sort of person she should have been allowed to encourage. I've been making inquiries. He is a bad lot, I should say. Naturally, a girl could not know such things. It takes a man to find them out. But I will do Ariadne the justice to say she can be reasonable. If I can manage to get her off alone, to some place where she cannot avoid me or refuse to listen quietly, I can soon convince her of his worthlessness. It is in securing such an opportunity for plain-speaking that you can be of the very greatest service."

The woman waited an instant to see if he had finished ; then clasping her hands and lifting pale, adoring eyes to his face, she reiterated fervently. "There is nothing you may not ask me. Oh, my dear husband, you are the noblest and most generous man alive."

"Good old girl !" he exclaimed, patting her shoulder lightly. "Just stick to that, and we shall soon rescue ourselves and our daughter. Now, listen carefully !"

He drew a second chair so close that she could feel the warmth of him. The faint odor of perfume and tobacco flowed through her senses like an anæsthetic. She leaned toward him, almost faint with the ecstasy of this new and intimate bond. At last they were working together for a common good. The man talked rapidly. His low, silken voice seemed dragging across her prostrate soul.

"Yes, yes — I will do it. Yes, I can remember everything," she would whisper in the pauses of the intoxicating sound. "You may rely on me to do it all, exactly as you have described. It is little enough compared with what you have forgiven me. And as for that wretched girl," she cried, when the wonderful conference was at an end, "she does not deserve that you should take all this trouble to save her from a common fortune-hunter !"

"Now I must go to my room," stated the Oriental St. George. "I suppose that Ariadne will condescend to appear at luncheon ?"

"Of course," answered Donna. "She's been coming to all her meals. Why shouldn't she appear ?"

The man laughed. "A girl in love is notably capricious. You must be careful in the way you open the subject of our drive."

"You just watch and see how tactful I can be," she vaunted. "Oh, Conniè !"

Now she dared stretch out arms of longing. She even hoped a little that he might kiss her, but with a pleasant nod and a murmured "Au revoir!" he turned and left.

Mr. and Mrs. Martel were already seated as Ariadne entered the dining-room.

The girl took her accustomed seat in silence, returning by a slight inclination of the head her stepmother's vivacious greeting. Martel did not speak to her at all. For this she was duly grateful. She could not eat, and finally abandoning all pretense, leaned back in her chair and gazed out through the great, shining window-panes to the crowded garden, where yellow acacia trees and tufted lilacs stood on tip-toe to wave their lovely wares against the glass.

She had almost forgotten her companions when an impatient sound from Mrs. Martel and a sharp plucking at the sleeve recalled her.

"Ariadne! What on earth do you mean — sitting there staring like an idiot? People are beginning to notice. I've spoken to you twice."

"Yes, Donna. I'm very sorry. What was it you were saying?"

"Connie has hired a lovely car — a special, and wants us to have a little drive this afternoon."

The girl, still half-submerged in reverie, was so long in replying that Mrs. Martel, shaking her arm again, said: "Do you understand? We are to start immediately after tea."

The girl gave a little sigh and came back to the present. "Can't Mr. Martel go with you, Madonna?"

Martel replied for himself. "Unfortunately, no. I have promised a chap over at the Hotel des Indes to have a game of billiards."

"I need a drive frightfully," exclaimed Donna, "but I

certainly do not intend going alone." Her double chins quivered.

"Very well then. I shall be ready," said the girl in a colorless tone.

Mrs. Martel flashed a little look of triumph at her husband. His response was an imperceptible frown. Thoughtfully he tilted the stem of his tall wine glass, gazing down into it. His beautiful, sinister face was as empty as the crystal cup.

For once Donna was ready before the time. As Ariadne reached the entrance door, her stepmother stood just within it, admiring the big car, and chattering to any or every one who cared to listen of Mr. Martel's thoughtfulness in securing so splendid a vehicle.

"Well, here you are at last!" she cried, as she caught sight of Ariadne. "I am glad you wore your new motor-bonnet. Gracious! What long strings! That little cluster of pink roses at the side is too adorable."

"I love this color of gray-blue. But then you always get me pretty clothes, Donna," answered the girl, smiling.

The little *portier* was behaving very strangely. He had gone round and round the car much as a small dog circles a formidable, large one, and paused each time at the front, where a much begoggled chauffeur slouched suddenly, as if resenting the inspection.

"Why, it is a limousine!" cried Ariadne in surprise. "We don't need a closed car on so warm an afternoon."

"Connie thought an open one might be too exposed for me," explained Mrs. Martel glibly. "Besides, the clouds are blowing in from the sea. It may rain before we get back."

She moved toward the car. The *portier* darted forward to hold the door open. At her last words he threw his grizzled head backward, staring up toward the sky.

"Is it to be a long drive, Madame?" he asked anxiously.

"I am not sure — that is —" she corrected herself hastily, "it depends on how I feel. I've been rather poorly, as you know. Come, Ariadne, what are you waiting for!"

The *portier* did not stand aside. "You will do best not to drive far, Madame," he repeated with such earnestness that Mrs. Martel gave an exclamation of annoyance. She rustled in, leaving a trail of perfume, and gave Ariadne an imperious sign to follow. In contrast to her usual custom, she took the corner farthest away.

The *portier*, now forced to step aside, leaned over suddenly toward the driver and said a few low words in Dutch. He was answered gruffly in the same language. Instinctively the little man threw out a hand toward Ariadne, the other he ran wildly through his hair. The girl stared down at the excited old face in wonder, but at her stepmother's angry summons, brushed past him and entered. Instantly the car curved out toward the Tournooiveld.

The *portier* watched it, his brows making a thatched roof over his keen eyes. Scarcely had it gained a thoroughfare when he saw a man, Mr. Martel, moving quickly toward it from the opposite direction. He had signaled the driver. The car never quite came to a standstill. Martel sprang in from the farther side. Through the glass the *portier* could see the figure of Miss Skipwith. She had risen at once and was trying to open the door beside her. The chauffeur, all cap-brim and leathern mask, flung his whole body half-way to the right and seemed to lock the door. The girl's figure sank out of sight. The car leapt forward with a burst of speed that made pedestrians scatter. "Gott!" cried the old man, rushing back into the house.

Within the car, Ariadne was saying: "You must let me out. There is no need for me if Mr. Martel is going. I will only crowd you."

"Crowd us!" echoed the stepmother, with an hysterical laugh. "Why, you and I were positively rattling around on this enormous seat. I am only too thankful that Connie's man didn't turn up, and he is here to help us stay in."

"I can't go. Do you hear me? I can't. I won't!" cried Ariadne, in a low, fierce voice.

She attempted again to rise. Martel did nothing to restrain her, but the rapidly increasing motion along cobbled streets soon flung her backwards. She was literally wedged between Martel's right shoulder and the car.

Donna, her teeth chattering with excitement, leaned around from his further side. "Be still, I tell you!" she almost screamed. "You've put us through too much already. I insist upon your behaving yourself for once like a rational human being."

Ariadne became quiet. For the moment struggle and opposition were worse than useless. It was best to feign acceptance of the situation. She huddled back into her corner, shrinking as far from Martel as the narrow space permitted. After all, Donna was with them. He would scarcely attempt to repeat the Dordrecht scene before his wife.

With the clearing of her mind the girl began to realize, as she believed, the motive for this detestable conspiracy. It was a trick, of course. They had known from the first that Martel was coming. They had planned it, doubtless thinking to find a way in which she would be forced to listen quietly to renewed warnings and accusations against Randy. She, like a foolish, absent-minded

rabbit, had walked into the trap and must now accept the consequences. "It cannot really matter what they say of him," she reasoned. "Donna is only a mouthpiece and an echo of this terrible man beside me. I need not even listen. I will be going over and over in my heart the hours that Randy and I have spent together."

Her thoughts thus turned almost desperately inward, Ariadne scarcely noticed the flying world without. Glancing now through her window, she saw that the town had been left and they were on a long, tree-lined avenue that suggested Hobbaema, where villas, surrounded by many-colored gardens, alternated with copses of small trees. The houses flashed by at longer intervals. The little forests, blurred in their own green, and beginning to darken under the gathering blackness of clouds, seemed all at once to converge. The road grew narrow and had sharper turnings. Few other vehicles passed them.

In the limousine no further words had been spoken. The atmosphere was charged and tingling with dynamics deliberately suppressed. The girl wondered nervously at their reticence. She longed to have the ordeal over. Perhaps they had selected some sylvan road-house or "Pavilion" where Martel's slow eloquence might have a more æsthetic setting. This conjecture appeared so plausible that when the car began to slacken its hitherto high speed she had no thought of menace. Her imagination had become a conscious boon. Until these two so near and so strangely silent should see fit to begin their odious invective, she could at least look out from her own side of the car, feeling the actual scene as one is subconscious of the background of a cinema play, while all real interest follows the motions of the human actors. For her the entire universe had become a film on which memory threw a single figure.

It was with the sensation of a sleeper awakened by a sound already passed, yet of the instant, that she came back to the present. The motor was almost at a stand still, though the engines seemed to throb impatience at the check. Donna got quickly to her feet. Martel flung back the door with his left hand. Ariadne, springing up, moved toward it. Mrs. Martel was on the step. Martel, with a single, powerful, backward sweep of his right arm, flung the girl down to her seat. The machine bounded forward as if a spur had pricked it. A cry came from Donna. She had fallen heavily. Neither Martel nor the driver seemed to hear. The car raced on with the left door banging. Ariadne, with one low, terrible cry, hurled herself upon Martel and fought for her life.

Still in a nightmare clutch the girl struggled. Martel's arms were around her. With his weight he dragged her to him. The car swayed. The driver, leaning far to the left, caught at the door with his hand and slammed it.

The two pent figures, locked in a silent, hideous combat, swayed with the flying car. Now on her feet, now flung from side to side — again, half-escaped and one arm free, the girl fought furiously. The car was a meteor in space and no road was under it, no arching sky above. It was a thing detached, a missile demon-spent through shadows; only it swerved a little, now to one side and then to the other. And the locked figures, too, wavered back and forth. There were moments when the girl's slim strength would seem victorious. No jungle beast at bay ever struggled more fiercely. The other, that deadly, dangerous Thing that clung about her, struggled not at all. His object was to tire, to gain his victory by an inertia as desperate and far more potent than her own primitive defense. She realized defeat, but fought on silently. To hurl herself from the car, even through



shattered glass, was her one passionate wish. She managed to free one hand and reach behind her for the opening lever of the door. It might have been the handle of Siegmund's sword in the oak. There was one chance yet.

"Driver! Chauffeur!" she screamed, beating with her body against the window-frame. The man in front pushed back his cap, removed the great goggles, and looked around at her. And now indeed the fear of death, and worse than death, gripped Ariadne's soul, for it was François' face peering horribly through the glass.

She sank back helplessly to the cushioned seat. Martel, releasing her, also sat upright. He rearranged his cuffs, bestowing special care upon the small watch-bracelet which had gone awry, and laughed softly. Ariadne leaned back, waiting until the faintness and the long, shuddering sobs of exhaustion should have passed.

Not once did her eyes close. She sat staring, trying desperately to think, trying to find something she could say to such a man.

Martel took out his cigarette case. All of his old ease and languor had returned; but Ariadne knew the crouching jaguar within him.

"Mr. Martel?" she said to him at length.

"Yes, my dear."

"Why have you done a thing like this?"

No answer. He was busy with a match, but at the moment of lighting, the girl saw the swift, sidewise flash of his look and the twitch of prehensile fingers.

"I'm not going to try it again; I see that it's useless."

"Now you are talking like a rational being."

"If you have brought me here, if you have taken the trouble to plan all this just to force me into listening to what you wish to say of Mr. Carr, I will listen quietly. I will try to think it is as Madonna says — that you

mean it kindly — only let us speak and hurry back to Madonna. She fell and may have hurt herself in getting out."

Martel seemed pleased. "That's very nice of you. But my — er — plans, as you call them, now include more than mere conversation, even on so delightful a theme."

"Where are you taking me? What did you tell Madonna to make her willing to leave me?"

He leaned his dark, shiny head against the cushions. They had passed from woods into an open road. Though clouds were gathering, there was still clear daylight. The speeding car was filled with it.

"Two questions at one breath! You seldom are so generous, my Ariadne. As to my answers, I prefer that you should wait and see where I am taking you. Why dull the edge of a pleasant surprise?"

He paused and flicked the ash from his cigarette. Part of it blew across Ariadne, dusting the dark blue of her skirt.

"A thousand pardons!" he murmured, and taking a handkerchief from his cuff, brushed it delicately. Ariadne forced herself to be still. She said nothing more, and after a pause, Martel went on:

"Yes — there was the second question — one concerning our dear Madonna. This scarcely needs an answer, I should say. You have only to recall her trustfulness, one of those charming attributes of youth, and though this may seem boasting, her entire devotion to my unworthy self."

This time her shudder of loathing was harder to conceal. He had her at his mercy. She would have to listen, no matter what he said. But even his venom must wear itself away soon. He would not keep Donna

long waiting at the roadside, especially when the predicted storm was threatening to break at any moment.

The car slowed in pace somewhat. The man did not move closer, but she knew by instinct that his vigilance had increased. A few houses flew past them. The open square, a small settlement, with a church facing it; canal bridges, and a few boats, all flashing by as in the twirl of a mirror. Then again an open road and a green blur of endless marshes. No possible help could have come to her in the little village. Ariadne had often heard of the sullen hatred cherished by these provincial Dutch communities toward all English-speaking peoples. To them Americans and Britons were the same. The Boer losses in South Africa had been real to many of these toylike homes. Yet, when the village was behind them and the speed of the car increased, she felt an added sense of hopelessness.

If the sleek silent creature would only talk and be through with it. If only he would not smile. Desperately she turned to him.

"If you have nothing more to say to me, let us turn back before the storm comes. We can't leave Madonna in the wood much longer — and I — I am horribly afraid of lightning."

"So feminine?" he said, lifting his brows. "I must try to find you a shelter."

"On this endless marsh?" she exclaimed. "We've passed the last house toward the sea, I know. Please, please let us turn back now."

She knew her pleading voice was honey to his oft-wounded vanity. She hated her own words as they came, but some way must be found to reach him.

He made no answer. She did not dare to look at his face.

"At least then," she broke out more vehemently, "let me know just what you want of me, so we can understand each other."

"All in good season, my dear girl. One does not sip a vintage as the Dutch swallow the milk of their cows."

"If by a vintage you mean my distress and humiliation, surely you have it now," said the girl.

"Yes? But that is such a little part of what I mean," he murmured. "Be patient, girlie, one loses much in taking a new experience too quickly."

"What — what — do you mean by a new — experience?" she faltered. At the shrinking horror in her eyes, he smiled.

"I believe you begin to know, my ice-maiden."

Suddenly she struck with all her might upon the pane. A long diagonal of light showed in the glass and stayed there. Martel flung down his cigarette and caught her.

"I've been watching for that," he said, but very quietly. "Now I shall have to hold this fierce little hand. Just think how you might have disfigured it." He bent above it tenderly, but the girl, with a low cry of disgust, caught it away.

"Are we to have another contest at jiu-jitsu, then?"

For one terrifying moment she thought that unconsciousness was coming. This she must ward off, whatever the cost. She sat forward, gasping. When her brain cleared, Martel had both her hands in his, and was looking down upon her.

"Dear little frightened bird," he murmured, "tomorrow at this time she'll be quite tame."

"Don't dare to say such things to me! Don't hint at such hideous impossibilities!"

"Impossibilities?" Again the arched eyebrows. "My child, I speak of certainties."

"You know the life I've lived — the sort of girl I am," said Ariadne, speaking now very quickly. "No one could think it a happy life, but no evil has come into it, except that which must always be near you."

"I wouldn't say things like that, Ariadne."

"The courtships and happy love affairs of other girls could not come to me. I realized it and tried not to wish for happiness. I knew I was bound to my stepmother. No self-respecting man — no man that I would care to marry — would be willing to throw in his lot with mine — to follow where you chose to lead — to sit by quietly and listen to you while you sneer at and ridicule the woman who clothes and feeds you."

"Take care!" he said in a lower voice.

"Oh, I'm not saying all this to sting you, Mr. Martel! I have no wish to hurt even a thing like you. I am only speaking to you for the first time in my life of my own lot — my own hidden sadnesses. I have relinquished, for your sake and your wife's, all that goes to personal happiness, and because I have had to keep my mind from such things, I am perhaps more unworldly, more ignorant, than many who are younger —"

"Don't you suppose I know that?" he put in, almost roughly for him.

"But some facts of life even I must know, and one is —" She faltered, and the strained whiteness of her face changed to a flaming scarlet and went white again.

"Yes?"

"That — that — it is in a man's power to do a girl so terrible a wrong that Death would be a sacred gift compared with it — such a wrong that no girl, touched by it, could go on living for an hour."

"I am surprised!" Martel murmured.

She would not let his mockery deter her. It was the

girl's soul that poured from her parted lips. She turned now, looking full in his handsome, evil eyes. The touch of artist in the man made him see for an instant the face of a young angel, newly-stationed at the gates of Paradise. He had been reared a Catholic, and all that was real in him cringed, in that moment, before a virgin's shrine. Perhaps, if the girl had not been so beautiful when pleading —

"I do not think you capable of such infamy, Mr. Martel. I am, through chance, under your protection. I have no father or mother. Don't think I believe for a moment such a thing of you. Only — your way of speaking — the hints you have been giving — it is only to frighten me, I know. Just tell me what it is you want; and take me back. Oh, Mr. Martel, take me back now — now, at once, to the wife who loves us both."

The man's face had been changing. He had listened at first with lowered eyes, but now the mention of his wife's name seemed to madden him.

He gave an exclamation which the girl had never heard before, some strange foreign oath, and laughed, snapping his fingers.

"To my wife, with her soothing voice and multiple caresses. 'Connie'!" How exquisite the intonation. "Back! To throw you in the arms of that American! It's not all ice and snow and virginal ignorance! I had sworn to be the first man that should touch you. I have been famished for that first kiss on lips so long withheld. He cheated me. You think you love him. Perhaps you've not admitted it to your chaste thoughts, but in time you would find a way to go to him. But my chance is here now. I will not lose it, not if I burn in Hell flame after. You ask what I intend. Well, you shall have it. We'll not go back for Donna; she can get home. We will

not see the Hague until to-morrow. What ! no screams — no protestations ! And when we do go back” — his voice sank lower, excitement vanished from his face, and his lids narrowed as each word sent in its fang — “the last face you will wish to see will be that of your lover.”

Yes, she had it now, and no cries came. A blessed dullness crept across her mind, a mist hiding the blackness of the chasm. She lifted her hand and pushed the heavy hair back from her forehead. How sweet the air was growing ! How cool and beautiful a thought was Death. “He leadeth me beside the still waters ; He restoreth my soul,” a voice in her heart was saying. Yes, the young mother would surely come in such an hour.

The blessed mists rose higher. They, too, were cool. A look of exaltation shone in the girl’s upturned face. Martel muttered something and turned away.

And then there was Randy, who loved her and whom she had once so dearly loved. “Randy, my dear, my dearest !” her heart whispered. This was a cry of life — of longing ; no need for young love now ; and under it all — above — within — came the still, spirit voice : “Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death —”

The car sped on ; just here there were ruts and the fret of stones. Ariadne was oblivious to the motion. She no longer counted the minutes. Soon time for her would be at an end. Let the dull mists creep higher. The blurring of all senses was a more abiding peace.

The dark shape beside her did not speak again. For the moment it, too, dissolved into oblivion. The something that was herself, that essence, that intelligence, seemed somewhere far away, a crystal, still unshattered, held in the outstretched hand of death.

The car once more slackened its speed. The shape near her stirred and said "At last!" A few dark cottages appeared. There were forms outside that wore strange faces, or were they masks? Life grinned at her from the hollow sockets; this world was still at hand, then, or rather this grim shard of a world.

The motor crept on slowly, panting and whimpering like an exhausted animal. Several of the human figures outside began to keep slouching pace with it. The scrape and clatter of wooden shoes fell into rhythm with the shuddering car. From the sky came a dull volley of thunder, and a few great raindrops slanted across the windows of the limousine.

The last house of the small fishing hamlet had apparently been passed, but the shivering car continued on. Then just beside an isolated hut, with a roof so broad and low that the corner eaves bent down to peer in at the stranger, the car stopped. The wooden shoes stopped also instantly. The small house faced the sea. Ariadne, at her side of the car, could have reached up and broken off a gingerbread tile as did the children to the witch's house. Her situation was as fantastic, as unreal, but here was underlying tragedy a part of fundamental evil.

François was beating his cramped hands together. He might have been at the Doelen entrance. In the same ordinary manner Martel, looking up to the sky, answered:

"Yes, it will be the devil of a downpour, but the car will have to take it."

François came closer and asked something, sending, as he did so, a quick look toward the girl. Martel's reply was not lowered.

"Of course you must sleep in it. You can manage for



one night. I wouldn't trust these Dutch pirates with it a minute, unless you kept watch."

The fishermen stood about now in a silent ring. Except for the fact of being there at all, they seemed to feel no interest. Their faces were apathetic, their eyes dull. A few women joined them; one held an infant in her arms.

Martel, scowling, said to François: "Can't we send them away?"

"Better not, sir. You see they are not friendly. We must keep to the line you said."

"I suppose you're right. Then go ahead and open the house."

As François left, his master, coming to the left side of the car, held out his hand.

"Come, Ariadne, we don't go farther than this."

She did not move.

"You might as well come, you know."

Still she sat, her hands clutching the seat.

"If you think that by resisting and trying to make a scene, these Dutch fools will help you, I assure you they won't. They think we're English, and they hate us."

The girl turned a little, sending her hunted eyes from one face to another. Martel was right. The one legible expression was that of a sullen dislike. There was an old man there on the edge with thick, gray hair, Dutch-cut under a green cap. His face suggested a touch of human kindness.

All this time she had not moved or looked at Martel. He stood upright now and said rather wearily:

"It simply means that François and I will have to drag you out." Turning toward the house he called: "François!"

"Coming, sir."

"I will get out," said the girl.

She stood now in the muddy street. The rain fell steadily. None of the stolid Dutch seemed aware of it.

"This way to the house, Ariadne," said Martel. She broke away from him, running to the old man with gray hair.

"Oh, help me, help me!" she said to him, holding her hands in the attitude of prayer, trying to throw her agony of supplication into her face and eyes. The old man stepped backward. She followed him. Surely it was a gleam of human pity that she saw. François said a few words in clear Dutch. The woman carrying the baby edged her way through the crowd. Ariadne, with a cry, would have gone up to her, but a young fisherman, thrusting the woman back, stood before her in an attitude of protection. The old man touched his forehead, shook his head, and looked around at his companions.

Ariadne understood. The villagers had been told that she was insane, possibly dangerous, and had been brought here to save her from a common madhouse.

Martel, who had stood aside, now approached, taking her right arm. She resisted no further. François came close to her on the left, and the three moved toward the door of the house.

The first effect was of a forgotten crypt under a church. The close, damp smell was that of stone. Four candles burned on a ledge opposite. If there were windows, they had been closed against all possibility of light and air.

"Not very suitable for a lady's boudoir, I'll admit," said Martel. "But there is a little furniture, when your eyes get accustomed to the darkness. We're to have supper in another room. Have this chair, won't you?"

He reached out in the darkness and drew one up. As Ariadne took it, he went back to the door and began to fasten it with bolts. There was one other door. This stood in the center of the long, plain wall to the left and led into the room where Martel said they were to have supper. François could be heard moving about in there.

A lash of rain drove against the tiled roof, and thunder shook the earth in which the cottage was implanted rather than on which it was built, for the floor was earth-hardened and beaten down by generations of human service, and the thick walls were of cement. Gradually, in the yellow candlelight, Ariadne could make out the setting of her prison chamber, not that she looked consciously or realized that this could form part of memory.

She was more alive than she had been since Martel disclosed his intention in the limousine; those other human things with their hostile faces had shattered her mists. Always, now, her mind moved, writhing and turning under its blinding net of fear, trying for a weakened strand or the loose end of a possibility. Perhaps even in this rigid cell there would be a cranny of escape. The sea was close. She might manage to reach it in the night. At least there might be something here to use as a weapon.

The four candles were set in their own grease upon a blunt jut of cement over a fireplace long unused. The place had been recently cleaned, and the old bricks of the hearth reddened. No fire-irons had been left — not even the hook from which a kettle once swung. Around two sides of the wall, up quite close to the cemented ceiling, there was another narrow ledge once used for plaques and jugs. She could see dimly the white circles on the wall against which the plates had leaned.

There were three tiny windows with no glass, only the

heavy, single shutters, battened tightly, apparently from without. For furniture there was the thick, wooden chair on which she sat, two others like it, a small, wooden table, and in one corner a large bed, or rather an enormous low divan, spread smoothly but with no pillows. The entrance door was behind her.

Martel, having completed the fastenings, came slowly back, sank into another chair, and lighted a cigarette. His face had grown almost somber. In the silence, Ariadne heard some one fumbling at the bolts outside the door. For an instant the hope, so nearly dead, grew vivid.

"It is only François," murmured her companion.

He had lost, it would seem, his late desire to taunt and mock at her. Had she looked at him, she would have seen that he had grown pale, and that his eyes were tired; but it was merely the languor following the achievement of a preliminary success. He was pleased that he could allow himself an utter relaxation. Things were going exactly as he wished and, besides, there was so much time. At last he stirred.

"How it is pouring!" he remarked casually. "All those wooden Dutchmen are safe in their hovels now, you may be sure." After a while he added, glancing round the room: "And there are no houses that can be shut quite so securely." Even in this there was no sneer in his voice. He had merely made a statement.

A terrific crash, following what must have been a close lightning stroke, shook the earthen floor under them. No hint of the glare had penetrated.

"Beastly stuffy place this," said the man. "François will have us a fire in the next room."

"Mr. Martel," the girl began, "there is something else I want to say to you."

"I am listening."

"You know, of course, the unusual conditions of my father's will?"

"Only what I have been told by his widow."

"In order to make it certain that I should never give up Madonna, it was arranged that she would be left penniless should I desert her."

"Oh, yes, that part of it. Doubtless it is also known to your friend — the American."

"Randolph? Of course; he drew up the will."

Martel was taken aback. Then suddenly he gave the laugh that the girl hated.

"There is something I wish to suggest — a compromise," she went on.

"Kindly look at me sometimes when you speak, Ariadne. Ah! you can't. Is it hate only — or perhaps the dawn of a certain tenderness? Well, never mind, that will come. A compromise, you say? My dear girl, I will listen. It is very pleasant to hear your Southern voice; but really, if I may say it, I do not think you have the material for a compromise."

"Take me back to the Hague now," she went on, as if he had not spoken.

"Trust you in such a storm as this — when, too, you are so horribly afraid of lightning?"

"You know well how gladly I would walk the distance, Mr. Martel. But please let me finish."

"Oh, yes — terms of surrender; I mean — pardon — of compromise."

"When I get to the Hague, I will not go to the Doelen at all, but to another hotel."

He raised his eyebrows.

"I will write at once a letter to Madonna, stating that I have left her — that I deliberately break my word to my father —"

"I believe I begin to see. You are more resourceful than I thought!"

"I will make it such a letter that even Judge Henry cannot act otherwise than carry out the conditions which such a step will demand. The money will come to me, and I pledge myself to make it yours, legally, at once."

The man said nothing. He was watching her with cool amusement, mingled with æsthetic satisfaction. Now, in this last appeal, she was pleading with her deep eyes, too.

"It is a great deal of money, Mr. Martel. Judge Henry will not keep a penny back. It is growing more every minute. Oh! let me do this; let this satisfy you."

"So you think that money is everything I want?"

"Not money, but the luxuries — the way of life it brings. You'll be so very, very rich. Oh! say you'll let me do it."

Martel's lids narrowed. "I believe in money. You make no mistake there. I've had it for years, and intend always to have it. Perhaps, a little later on, I will let you carry out this pretty plan, but, my Ariadne, there are other things I want as well as money, and I intend to have them, too."

She sat silent, staring into the empty fireplace. The man wondered at her composure. Her next words were those of her inward thoughts, rather than a direct address to him:

"I suppose a man like you can really believe a girl would consent to go on living." She threw her head back, and for an instant put one hand to her throat. He thought she was going to faint and half rose to spring toward her, but she motioned him back.

A low knocking came to the room door at the left.

This time Ariadne did not need to be told it was "only François." She heard him say:

"Supper is ready, sir."

Martel rose with unusual quickness. "As our repast is served, you might as well come in. I think we both need it."

She looked full scorn at him and was beginning: "And you can think —" when suddenly a thought came. If there is food, there will be knives and forks, breakable dishes, glasses, too, for the inevitable champagne.

"Perhaps I had better," she murmured, and started with him toward the door.

Martel's dark eyes were luminous with suppressed laughter. "It's a very primitive little feast I have to offer you, my dear; only sandwiches — though many varieties of them — some Dutch cheese already sliced, an assortment of cakes and fruit — all conveyed hither in pasteboard boxes. There is champagne, of course. This compensates for other crudities though even the wine may have a queer taste from pewter."

She stopped short; he had even planned for this! Not one faggot heaped about the stake had been overlooked.

"I will not come," she said.

"As you please, *ma belle*, though I regret it."

He opened the door, showing a smaller room, bright and cheerful in a flicker of firelight, with many candles set about and burning. The repast was as he described, though a snowy tablecloth gave a somewhat civilized air. François stood beside a chair, holding a champagne bottle.

The crude door of wood was carefully thrown back against the inner wall. At a signal from Martel, François changed his place and came nearer the door. Martel exactly faced it.

The girl went first to the main entrance door, examining the bars. There were two of these — square beams let down into rusty supports. Even if she managed to lift them, there were other bolts outside. Those conspirators in the next room could leave her safely here.

She heard them talking together not as master and servant, but as the accomplices they were, relishing some recent achievement.

She leaned against the door, pressing one cheek to it. Only a few inches of wood between her and the storm outside. Once free, she believed she might succeed in hiding. If she were only able to reach the marshes, she could bury herself deep among the muddy stems, and in such wind-swept darkness — surely by this time night had come! — even make her way a few miles toward the Hague. After all, wood was not an indestructible material. She looked around quickly toward the shelf where the four candles stood. They were only half burned away.

If she could hide one under her coat until she regained the door, and then leave the flame against a panel, there was just a chance of its igniting. If this could be accomplished, she would go into the next room, pretending to eat and drink with Martel and perhaps keep his attention for a while. She was turning to get the candle when an unusually powerful gust of wind hurled, as it would seem, a solid sheet of water against the house. A slow stream stole in under the door, writhing serpent-wise across the earthen floor. What chance would a candle-flame hold against such elemental fury? There was no use trying; not one possibility was left. Yet something must be thought of. Her small motor-bonnet was tied under the chin with blue ribbons. She took it off, tore away the streamers as quietly as she



could, knotted the ends of them, and lying down against the wall, wrapped them round her throat, pulling the two ends fiercely. Before the strangulation disabled her, she had succeeded in tying the ends in a knot.

Through the ensuing agony her fast-ebbing consciousness was a prayer: "Oh, Father in Heaven, this is my only chance. Let it succeed — don't let them hear — keep me from groans — physical suffering, that means so little now — only don't let me fail."

After a week — a year — of dumb struggling — she felt a sudden relaxing of the iron thing that bound her throat. She was lying softly — was it her own little bed at the Doelen? An arm was around her, and some one held a cup to her lips, whispering: "Drink."

She drank obediently. There was a strange odor in the place. Far away, as at the end of a long passage, shone four great stars. The dark form — a man — moved now between her and the stars. The man came nearer, looking past her to the some one who had made her drink.

"Is she coming round all right, sir?"

Ariadne dashed down the pewter mug and managed to stand up. She reeled, and Martel sprang toward her, but she shrieked: "No, no!" and staggered to the wall, where she leaned heavily.

Martel stood still and looked at her; she felt the malignant anger of his eyes. He gathered up the ribbon, twisted it into a ball, and threw it in her face.

"Another bottle, François," he said, and went into the next room.

There had not been from the first a possibility of his faltering; but Ariadne knew that had the spark of generosity existed, this last attempt of hers would have extinguished it.

He and François ceased to talk. She forced herself to look at him. He was leaning back in the half-turned, languid manner he affected. His face was dark and brooding, and his eyes fixed upon the table. He lifted the pewter, draining it, and held it out toward François to be refilled. On his little finger the ruby that Madonna had given him — the ruby bought with her father's money — hung like a drop of blood partly congealed.

A sickening tremor took possession of the girl. She could not stand, but in sinking she kept one outstretched arm against the wall to prevent her body from plunging forward. She reached her knees and remained there, still leaning against the wall. She was directly in line of vision for Martel. If he had noticed the partial collapse, he gave no sign. Somehow she no longer cared. The fierce reality of the horror which she faced scorched into nothingness more delicate sensibilities. She began to cry softly, rocking herself to and fro. She could not have thought any alleviation possible in such a pass, but the tears were merciful. Through them she felt less like the hunted animal at bay. She was a girl — no jungle beast — a girl, friendless but for one lover who could not save her, and forsaken by the God to whom she had prayed. She had heard of people who did not believe in God. Perhaps they, too, had faced some dreadful tragedy and had prayed to Him, finding no help.

"Oh, Randy! my lover! my dear, dear love! If you could know, if you could hear me calling you. I know you could save me yet. Randolph! It is Ariadne calling. You heard me once; can't you hear me now? Oh, Randy, Randy!"

The sound of Martel's chair being pushed back stung

her into watchfulness again. He had finished drinking. François was getting ready to go.

"Sure you have enough rugs?" Martel asked him.

"Plenty, with my big coat, sir."

"You ought to have something to throw over you to keep off the rain. Here, take the tablecloth, it will be better than nothing. Put some of these sandwiches in your pocket for the early morning. And remember, the car broke down, and it was impossible to fix it without a garage in such a storm. We were forced to take shelter in this cottage for the night."

"You can trust me, sir."

Martel went to the door with him.

"Be sure you bolt it firmly from outside. You can unbolt it any time you happen to get up to-morrow — just so it is after daybreak."

François said something in a low voice. Martel laughed.

Now he was gathering up the candles, blowing them out and placing them back on their sides. Two of the lighted ones he held above his head. He stood in the doorway a moment with them, darkness behind him, and the yellow, flickering light on his beautiful, evil face.

Ariadne gave a single look and turned to the wall, shivering. Martel, with his slow, soft step, carried the two candles to the mantel, adding them to the four now very nearly burned away. When they were arranged symmetrically, he carefully took off a drop of the melted wax that had fallen on the back of his lifted hand, wiped the spot with his scented handkerchief, and then, turning, looked at the cowering figure for a long moment. Then he moved quickly. At her side he paused again.

The girl fell forward, with her cheek upon the earth. He stooped to lift her.

## CHAPTER VI

WHEN the great limousine had vanished from the Tour-nooiveld, passing out at a far corner through a street so narrow that the enormous rubber tires seemed to have mounted, as a track, the opposing pavements, the little *portier* relaxed, at last, his attitude of rigid watchfulness.

He raised two pudgy fingers to his forehead, moving them crosswise in an absent-minded fashion. His face had lost its excitement. What it showed now was merely troubled thought, impinging on a sort of resigned hopelessness. Old Machem was, as usual, beside him. He had stood so long that she finally stretched herself full length on the sun-warmed bricks and lay with eyes contentedly closed.

Now her head lifted. The master had spoken, but it was to Peetje, demanding that a chair be brought. Into this the old man lowered himself stiffly, as if, all at once, he had become infirm. The sun slid under the accumulating banks of clouds. A low wind, with a tang of salt and penetrating dampness, stole in from the sea. Machem shivered and made a concave of warmth about her master's feet.

He did not notice her. His elbows rested heavily on the wicker arms of the chair, and his gray locks drooped forward until only the old dog, looking upward, could see his face. "Had the young monsieur but told me where he was to go!" the *portier* was thinking. To himself he had become a species of droll fairy-godfather

to the vivid and lovable young Americans. He had seen much, this gray old *portier*. He had become, unconsciously, a keen judge of character and of human conditions. Friends he had in all parts of the inhabited world. But never before had he known a stranger who so enchained his interest and affection as had "Mees Skeepvitt."

It was not only her beauty and gentleness, or the ease with which she had won shy little Betje's heart. There was an intangible something about her, a pathos, a golden aloofness, as it were, that made him see her through Betje's eyes as a true Fairy Princess — held by sinister enchantment, until her Fairy Prince should come.

Only three days ago deliverance and happiness-ever-after seemed so close to her! Surely the tall American was her true lover. Her happy eyes confessed it. The queer, alien godfather had even borne his part in the awakening of love. Then, all at once, the prince had gone, and evil again encompassed her.

If only there were something to be done! But, fairy godfather though he called himself, he was as impotent and perhaps more ignorant than the white dog at his feet.

Under the stress of these gloomy cogitations the *portier*, breaking a self-established rule which had been maintained for more years than Ariadne had been on earth, produced and lighted an afternoon cigar. His next, the third and last for that day, should have been just before bedtime.

The contraband luxury soothed him. The very fact of his delinquency was stimulating, and his Dutch equanimity increased with each deep-drawn puff. He was a foolish old man, perhaps, to have such fears

for Mees Skipvitt. After all, the fat stepmother was in the car ! And why should not the husband, Monsieur Martel, have seen and joined his ladies midway across the Tournooiveld ? There was nothing strange or threatening in that. Yet — what of the slouching, masked chauffeur, recognized as François, and the face of Miss Skeepvitt pressed in white terror against the closed car-window. Why did the mask reach out and lock that door ?

A great rumbling of heavy wheels and the thud of horses' hoofs upon the brick pavement announced the arrival of the station hotel omnibus.

The old man looked up quickly, half hoping that a miracle might have brought the Virginian back. The vehicle was empty except for the French maid of a lady who was to follow by a later train.

On the high seat beside the driver was perched the station porter and interpreter, a smiling young Swiss. The words "Vieux Doelen Hotel" shone in gold across his dark blue cap. This he had lifted to the *portier*, when a thought made the old man give him an imperious gesture to descend.

The interpreter obeyed, not altogether willingly, for the *portier* had a sharp tongue for reproof ; also a keen Dutch thrift in claiming his personal share of fees. For this once his interrogations flowed into a very different channel and were, in consequence, answered with an equal readiness. "*Oui, oui, ja, — Mynheer,*" he assented in a cheerful mixing of tongues. "Well I remember the tall young sir of the brown face and white teeth. He had no Dutch. I bought for him his railway ticket."

"*Ja*, the ticket. But what ticket. To which place."

"Only to Rotterdam, Mynheer."

"Good ! Did he inquire of you the best hotels ?"

"No, Mynheer."

The *portier's* face fell. "There are but few to which Americans go," the old man murmured, and was slightly comforted. This was already two days past, however. The average tourist does not, as a usual thing, remain long in the big, commercial city. His hands went up among the thick bristles of his hair.

"The young sir did not appear such a one as hastens off without paying his bills," ventured the Swiss sympathetically. Thoughtfully he inserted two fingers into the breast pocket of his uniform and kept them there while, his head a little to one side, he watched the *portier* shrewdly. "Perhaps, in that case—" he had begun, when the *portier*, as if having only then taken in the meaning of his last remark, cried angrily:

"Run off with unpaid bills! Who said it? He is a most honorable monsieur. It is for something more important than bills that I would find him."

The interpreter looked astonished and withdrew his fingers. "I am rejoiced to hear. Yet, had he rudely escaped, I should feel it my duty, in service to the Doelen, to yield this check-claim for the trunk he left down at the station."

The *portier's* troubled face grew bright. "His trunk! Then he is to return to us!"

"So he declared; perhaps to-morrow, Monday."

"Let me observe his ticket for myself," demanded the *portier* and held out a trembling hand. The name Carr was written plainly.

"This is good news, my lad. Enter the hotel and demand coffee in my name, also patisserie. I will now telephone to Rotterdam."

Trotting into his tiny den, a room so crowded with its great desk, iron safe, and racks of pigeonholes that the

*portier* had to edge his way in between them, he finally reached the telephone.

Each of the leading Rotterdam hotels was called in turn. No such American had been registered. He thought next of the business firms that represent interests in foreign countries, but again met with disappointment. The dauntless questioner had begun to consider the feasibility of getting at all private citizens whose names sounded either American or English when an inspiration came. He rang sharply. "Long distance again. Yes, the wire to Rotterdam. Get me the cable office."

"Line engaged !"

With a "tscht !" of annoyance he hung the receiver on its prongs.

He could not sit still long. His brain, a little dulled by routine, was stirred into unwonted activity. Suggestions, possibilities crowded into it.

Returning to the telephone, he demanded the leading garage of the Hague. Connection given, he poured forth inquiries at such a speed that the servant who had answered fled in search of the proprietor.

"It is I, Alex Brann, *portier* at the Vieux Doelen. I inquire concerning a car, a large limousine, hired a short while ago by one of our guests. It was black, with a strange number, and a chauffeur unknown to any."

That large car? Yes, the garage had seen it. Less than an hour before it had been brought for a new fill of petrol.

Interrogation and reply exploded like Dutch fireworks along the quivering wires.

The car was stained with mud. Evidently there had been hard driving along remote roads. It was a powerful engine, but not of the Hague. The garage knew every car of that city. Most likely it had come from Rotter-



dam. Yes, they had noted the strange driver, an ill-mannered, taciturn knave, who could speak a little Dutch, but badly — very badly, like a Frenchman. He had let fall a single fact, that he had just come from the Black Village. He had seen a Dutch girl there —”

“The Black Village !” stammered the *portier*, turning cold. “Why should he go to that remote and dreadful spot ?”

This no one could answer, and the *portier*, after quavering his thanks, sank down into the one chair.

“The Black Village !” He could hear nothing else — could not lead his frightened thoughts beyond that sinister name. It was a small, squat group of dwellings on the edge of the North Sea, noted for lawlessness and shunned by all. What should a foreigner do there ?

He gave a low groan. Machem, outside the door, whined piteously in answer, but he did not even hear. “Madame is with her ; there cannot be great menace if the stepmother is near !” his half-numbed brain assured him. The little den seemed closing. He must breathe wider air. He got, almost reeling, from the door, and went to the hotel entrance.

A taxicab had just drawn up. The driver, a man known to them all, said something to the servants that made two of them spring quickly toward the closed door. Madame, the stepmother was within, alone, and leaning back in a half-fainting condition.

Assistance was called, and the lady, hysterical with pain and terror, conveyed to her chamber.

The *portier's* eyes were now alarmed and staring. He flew back to his den and rang for the Rotterdam cable office frantically.

This time he was successful. “Yes, such an American had been much in the office. He had sent cables, many

of them, and answers had come. The last was at eleven the night before. No, the clerk had no idea where he was stopping. It was useless, in so large a city, to attempt a search for him. Of course were it a village like Den Haag —" a laugh came, at which the *portier*, projecting hideous sounds, stamped on the floor with fury.

He disdained defense of the Hague, he spluttered, oblivious of inconsistency, but just let him meet that rude person face to face ! For the moment he had something else to think of. It was danger, a terrible danger ! Messengers must be sent at once to all houses where Americans or English were to be found. The name was Carr, — Monsieur Carr, — yes, Carr, like a tram-car or a motor. He must be told that the Doelen *portier* desired him to return at once.

As the amazed listener appeared to hesitate, the *portier* screamed at him : "Don't stand there gaping like an empty cheese. This is a most frightful matter. Money will be paid to you — much money ! Go now and seek this Monsieur Carr."

"But, Mynheer Brann," expostulated the telephone. "How can it be ? I am a clerk here, a young and recent clerk left for the first time in full charge and alone. My superiors are all away from town on a half holiday."

"Being in charge you are your own superior, gosling !" almost wept the old man. "Stay a moment. Is it not possible that in the office Monsieur Carr has left some house address ?"

This the gosling could not say, as the office books had been locked up.

"Take, then, an ax and break the locks. Or, if necessary, discharge dynamite. I, Alex Brann, will assume all consequences !"

He sank back for a few moments of respite. After a little he rose, and called in an ordinary voice for the Hague garage.

"Is Big Jan Ryden at the stand?"

The servant did not know. He would inquire.

"Devils that eat us!" growled the *portier*. "No one knows anything on this day!"

The long pause seemed never to be broken, but when finally it was, Jan's own deep bellow answered him.

"Ah, it is you, Jan. Get the best car you can procure. Is there one of six cylinders?"

Jan regretted that a four-cylinder car was the most powerful car that could be procured at short notice.

"Select the best, and come to me here at once, my son."

Now the *portier* took time to wipe his brow. Jan was an army in himself, and few knew the surrounding country so well.

The *portier* tapped his bell and ordered the answering Peetje to fetch two large cups of coffee, steaming hot, also sweet biscuits — a large dish. "When the chauffeur Jan arrives, conduct him to me here," the old man added.

Scarcely were the steaming cups upon the desk when Big Jan drove up. Peetje ushered him den-wards, wondering at every step how he could possibly get inside, for Jan was a giant among his countrymen, a hillock of a man, with the pink cheeks and innocent blue eyes of a child.

Somehow he managed to enter, though he had to stoop for it, and, greatly to Peetje's chagrin, could even close the door.

Within there was indeed considerable difficulty to find a place for him. The *portier*, whose resourcefulness to-day appeared illimitable, contrived a seat for him

out of an inverted "Schnapps" box, thrust back between the desk and a corner of the room. Into this nook Jan squeezed himself by apprehensive inches, and when the box checked him, sat with knees high in air and very close together like some overgrown Peruvian mummy suddenly revived, who finds his sarcophagus too small. The refreshment, pushed comfortably near, quickly restored his cramped amiability. As the *portier* began to talk, he listened with childish interest, sipping the fragrant coffee, and devouring "Bisquit" unceasingly. For a time there was little for him to say besides "*Ja, ja, mynheer. Ik versta, mynheer.*" (I understand, sir.)

This kindly old man had always been his friend, and Jan was very glad to serve him, but to the slow, peasant mind, this excitement about an American girl was droll.

"She is not English, Jan. Remember that, my son. Not of the English who fought so unjustly in South Africa and took away our possessions. The Americans are greatly different. They live on the far side of the earth from England. They are our friends — yes. And they give money freely."

Jan's eyes brightened, at which the wily *portier*, lifting both hands palm down with the fingers closed, suddenly opened them to release an imaginary shower of *gulden*.

Jan gave an ecstatic cry of comprehension. Here at last was a motive that he could understand. He had begun to work himself upwards when the telephone's sharp ring, a reverberating hailstorm on tin roofs in these restricted quarters, sent him crashing back. The box gave way with a single detonation.

Ignoring his guest's predicament, the *portier*, with the receiver at his ear, again bombarded Rotterdam.

"Speak louder!" he commanded. "You do but jabber. Not so fast! No word have I understood as yet. Ah, Monsieur *Carr*!" This with a gasp of astonishment and joy. "Pardon, my ear was not bent for the English, though I might have known. Yes, Monsieur, you are needed. Come at once by the main road. I will meet—" He heard the distant receiver fall. The American had already started.

The *portier* chuckled. "It is he. It is monsieur in person," he announced in rapture. As there was no reply from Jan except a series of puffs and stertorian breathing such as might issue from an entrapped walrus, the little man turned. Two large, reproachful, blue eyes were fixed on him from just beneath the desk-top.

"Ach, my poor lad. My poor, good Jan," he deplored, now all contrition. "I did not hear you fall. You are not hurt?" he inquired anxiously. "You will be able to drive the car?"

The prostrate giant, finally extricated, felt his huge body all over before he assured the *portier* that he had incurred no permanent injury.

It was at least twenty minutes before Randolph, however swift his car, could possibly reach the end of the main bridge leading from Rotterdam into the Hague, but the *portier* could not restrain his impatience.

It was as well to be early, he explained to his companion. Americans did most unexpected things. Monsieur was as apt as not to come flying toward them in an aëroplane.

Once stationed at the bridge, side by side at the front of Jan's motor, not even the humblest of taxicabs got past them. The old man, callous to the torrent of indignation that each new outrage brought, shrugged as the drivers cursed him and the passengers frowned, and

murmured to Big Jan: "Of a certainty it was not monsieur, but I shall take no chances."

At last a long, low racer came toward them, blurring the distant road. "Gott, that is he! That is the American!" cried the *portier*, scrambling in his excitement to Jan's very lap. "Ach, how to stop him! He will leap over us like a deer! Can you drive a car like that, Jan?"

"It is a madman driving," muttered the chauffeur.

"True, for it is the American. There is but one figure in the car."

Breaking away from Jan and running into the very center of the road, the *portier* danced back and forth, his short arms waving, the steel of his gray hair threatening to snap out sparks.

Big Jan, following hastily, lifted the little man in his arms. Although the kindly behemoth had thought only of rescuing his patron, his bulk and deliberate motions did what the *portier's* frantic gestures might never have accomplished. Randolph, swearing audibly, was compelled to slacken speed. The sound of his own name, called out in an agony of vehemence, brought him to a quivering standstill.

"Here — here — is de Beeg Jan!" chattered the *portier*, as he dragged Jan to the front seat. "Take him beside you. He is to be relied on. He knows de way. Stop!" his voice rose to shriller command, for the American, scarcely waiting until Jan had placed his enormous foot upon the mud-guard, was about to speed forward.

"Beeg Jan hass no Engleesh. I mus' explain, Monsieur. Miss Skeepwitt is not dere, at the Doelen. Dey took her away in a large car; dey play de treek on her!"

It was hard to say which trembled the more violently, young Carr, or the suddenly arrested engine.

"At first Madame went, but soon she return alone, vid injury. Dey is going to de Black Village, de valet François driving."

"You are sure he knows the way," asked Carr, speaking for the first time, with a little nod toward Jan.

"Yes, — yes — it is for dat I employed him — dat and his great arms."

"I understand. Is there anything else I should be told?"

"I t'ink not, Monsieur. Only — may God be vid you — and vid dat lovely one." He stepped aside.

Randolph did not even thank him except by one deep look. This the small *portier* was never to forget.

As the gray, crouching car skimmed past, the little *portier*, watching for a moment, tottered to Jan's empty taxicab. Leaning his head against the seat still warm from the man's big body, he whispered: "Gott, let dem be in time. Let dem save her, de young mademoiselle who is so kind to all."

In silence, with signs from Jan, the racer continued her way in the direction of the North Sea, devouring the road. About midway of the distance Jan made a guttural sound and pointed to the left. As Randolph swerved into the turning he nodded his blond head and gave a satisfied "Ja." Soon they reached a little forest. The gloom of the late afternoon was reduplicated, but in a few moments they were again on an open highway. Partially submerged fields lay at either side. Few windmills showed and fewer cottages. But the road was still well kept and evidently in constant use. Children gathered buttercups beside it, and in

the distance the spire of a village church rose above clustering trees.

"Faster — I must go faster!" said Randolph to himself and touched a lever. Jan put out a hand to stop him, just too late. The round, Dutch face grew troubled. He said something in the dialect and made a backward motion with his head. Carr looked around quickly. A policeman, mounted on a special make of motor-cycle, came like an arrow after. Already, as the American knew, they were far beyond any speed-limit.

He stood up now, and placing Jan's hand on the wheel, drew out his pistol and deliberately leveled it at the approaching officer. The man appeared to hesitate, but Dutch obstinacy, if not valor, prevailed. He gave a vicious spurt, Carr watching him steadily. When the pursuer was close enough to see the other's face, he suddenly gave up. A mad Englishman! "All are more or less mad," he reflected, "but this one appears to be a demon! With that set face and eyes of fire, he could easily murder an entire village!"

After writing down the number of the car, the officer turned. What a story this would make at headquarters!

Randolph drove less recklessly. One fright of this sort had been enough. Beyond the last little town the ends of the earth began. Windmills disappeared entirely; even the ubiquitous cow no longer grazed. Only there were the long reeds bending all one way, and at times a space of dull gray bog that might well be quicksands, and over them white water-birds that wheeled in raucous flight.

The flat horizon seemed a gray canal on which heavily laden black barges moved slowly. Above, the center of the grayness sagged — an old tent curved with rain —



and should the seams part, the whole world beneath might well be swept away.

The road grew steadily worse. The track of previous wheels among the ruts and loose stones was plain. Now all ahead of them became soft sand. Capricious sea winds had chosen to deposit here a line of dunes, which a thrifty government had planted with pines. The groves were of dark bronze, but at the edge great tufts and fountains of yellow broom gleamed out with a startling effect of forgotten heaps of sunshine.

If only the car could move on faster! Randolph gave audible thanks to his Maker, as the last dune was left behind.

"The Black Village?" he asked. "*Zwart*—," for somehow he had remembered that the word meant "black."

"Ja!" nodded Jan assuringly, pointing ahead of them.

Each moment the sky grew blacker; sharp elbows of lightning nudged the scowling clouds. Their growls of anger dulled the vibrations of the speeding car. "Thank heaven," said Randolph aloud, "that at least the road is better here."

Even as he spoke there came a sound more terrible than any lightning stroke,—the sharp thin shriek and explosion of a punctured tire. They came to a standstill. For a moment the two human figures sat motionless, struck to stone.

The American sprang down in the road, Jan following more slowly. The latter, keeping his eyes averted as if in personal shame, searched for and opened the tool-kit. His wide face puckered, as if about to cry. Randolph, helpless in this mechanical crisis, darted about him for the sheer relief of motion.

Jan went about his task with the slow precision of a baby-elephant performing tricks. One might as well prod a sand-dune. The tortured Virginian hovered near, stretching out now and then a hand to offer unneeded assistance. The rain had begun, but colder drops broke out on the young man's forehead.

Jan, in silence and without haste, jacked up the car and began searching for the puncture. "*Neit sahr batt!*" he remarked, lifting a smiling countenance.

"For God's sake let me *pump*, then!" cried the other, taking the implement from the driver's hands. "I must do something or go stark mad!"

Jan watched anxiously. At the proper point he leaned down to interpose a restraining hand, for it seemed as if the American were pumping his very soul into the swelling rim. "*Ach, est goed,*" he growled compassionately, and took the pump away as one might remove a penknife from an infant.

"The next thing," remarked Randolph bitterly as the racer swung into speed, "is probably to be struck dead by this lightning!" All the powers of evil leagued with Martel. "Curses on his black soul!" hissed through his set teeth. Thought and imagination had been long held at bay, but now a tremor of physical rage shook him. He gripped the wheel as if he could crush it into twisted straw. He knew what a fighting wild beast feels when the hairs stiffen along its spine. "God! let me reach him! It can't be far off now."

Night had not closed in entirely. The swollen, blue-black clouds had the gleam of old pewter, and the hurled gray javelins of rain glinted as they fell. There was a slight lull in the wind. Randolph peered forward with a gaze of such desperate desire that he feared lest the simulacrum of a village might materialize from the tissue

of his brain. Was it a vision, a mirage of hell sent to mock him, or were those, indeed, the squat, black roofs of houses, still far off, on the rim of an endless sea?"

Jan turned a wet, pink face. "*Ja, mynheer, die is het Zwartdorp!*" he beamed.

"At last — at last!" Nothing could hold them from it now. Randolph could run the distance in ten minutes. The gables grew sharp. A single line of them tilted downward at the further end.

The young Dutchman, catching at the wheel, made a motion to slow the car. The other answered by relinquishing his place and moving into that vacated by his companion. Jan showed by nods and grunts that he approved. Turning slowly, he made his way along the rear of the houses. The first group terminated at a bridge, beyond which a few more scattered roofs appeared. No chink of light shone from them. All were sealed heavily against the storm.

Just behind one of the larger cottages a sort of shed could be seen. Jan paused to consider this and waited until several lightning flashes had convinced him of its desirability. Randolph dug his finger-nails into the seat with impatience. "Will he ever drive under the thing and let us start on foot?" he groaned. Each of these last moments of waiting was a red-hot wire thrust through his temples.

Before the car was half within, Randolph sprang out, touched Jan on the arm, and set off at a run. The Dutchman thundered after him, making a noise like that of a muffled bull. At sight of a limousine drawn up beside the farthest hovel, both stopped. Jan caught the American by the shoulder, and put his other hand up to his lips. They moved together toward the standing car.

Within, a match was struck. Its red glare disclosed the face of the unsuspecting François. Randolph drew his companion a few steps away, pointing first at the car, lifted his hands with the wrists crossed, and made motions of struggle against an imaginary binding.

Jan, when comprehension had finally dawned upon him, gave a guttural of assent, raised his eyebrows, and looked around the landscape as if hoping for the miraculous appearance of a rope. Randolph's eager search had been nearer home. Stripping off a flexible leather belt, he offered it, and in an instant more supplemented it by his pocket-handkerchief. Then, leaning down, he deliberately slit the two rear tires.

At the sound and shock of the dual explosion, the occupant of the car sprang out.

Jan caught him by the back of the neck and clapped the huge concave of his other hand upon the valet's face, which it covered as a walnut shell its kernel.

The trapped creature made no sound, nor did he offer the faintest opposition. The Dutch chauffeur went about his strange, unfamiliar task with the same pains-taking fidelity he might have used in painting an old taxicab. Randolph, zig-zagging through the mud, uttered violent imprecations against the delay.

Seating himself upon the running-guard of the limousine, which for a wonder did not give way, Jan crossed the valet's hands in front, the Frenchman watching him the while with a faint, cheerful curiosity. This, proving for some unfathomable reason not to be desired, François was unceremoniously flung, face down, across the Herculean knees, in the manner of a school-boy receiving chastisement. Slowly the bonds were tied, being woven in and out, and at last knotted with a thoroughness derived from sea-going ancestors, at which

the viking rose, and holding his trussed victim out at arm's length, deposited him tenderly within the car.

Randolph, with an oath of thankfulness, rushed toward the house. Jan caught him just before he touched the door. "*Nay, nay, mynheer,*" he warned, and seizing the young man's arm, forced him back along the crouching eaves.

François sat perfectly still. He had never spoken, and continued to wear a half-pleased smile. He was not unconscious of relief that the girl he had helped to betray was, after all, to find salvation. He had been in the car but a few moments when the brigands had fallen upon him. At least, he was not sorry.

As the other two made their way, with finger-tips trailing along a wall which to Randolph appeared interminable, his agonized ears were bent to catch some sound from within. The place might have been a charnel-house. There was no light anywhere. Even the lightning had ceased. Jan turned a corner and pausing, demanded in a whisper: "*Lu-cee-fer.*"

Randolph got out his matches. Fortunately they were of wax, and so had a chance against the wind. He struck one, and holding it in the curve of both gloved hands, saw that they were in a niche made by a small jutting wing, a mere closet, which had a low, square door.

The chauffeur gave a grunt of satisfaction and with slight effort broke away a rusted iron hasp. There was another fastening inside. A second match was lighted. The door-sill had been worn away to a curve, leaving a full inch of space. Into it Jan inserted his great fingers, palm upward, and slowly, irresistibly, and with little noise, drew the panel outward.

An odor of fire and food stole toward them. Jan

humped his great shoulders and would have crawled forward, but it was now the American's turn. He pushed the other backward and crept in. The closet was a grave of blackness. He rose to full height and felt until he had reached another door. This had no clasps. Opening it stealthily, he found himself in a room dimly lighted by the coals of a dying fire. Two empty champagne bottles, a pewter mug and some sandwiches were on the table.

A door in the center of the wall, opening at a narrow crack, showed clearer lighting. Carr ran to this, pulled out his pistol and flung the panel wide.

Directly across the room Ariadne was lying on the floor, her face in her arms, and stooping over her was Martel.

Hearing a sound, he looked back over one shoulder, thinking that François had returned. He jerked himself upright, threw both hands above his head, and reeled toward the corner where the bed stood.

"For God's sake don't shoot!" he cried. "I haven't harmed her. I haven't laid a finger — Ask her for yourself!"

But Ariadne was at last beyond the range of human torture or of human questioning.

Randolph did not move. Before his blazing eyes the other seemed to writhe and shrivel like a fungus thrown on coals.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot, I tell you!" he cried again, his voice shrilling to a scream. "I am unarmed; you cannot fire upon an unarmed man!"

"Keep those hands in the air," commanded Carr.

Big Jan, incredibly huge, loomed in the open doorway.

"Ah, you are prudent," Martel began, but at Carr's

forward movement the incipient sneer turned to cringing fear.

"Search him, Jan," ordered the lawyer, and with his left hand indicated what he wished.

Jan went to the task with accustomed cheerfulness. At one sly, downward motion of Martel's arm, Carr cried, in a sharper tone: "Hands up, I say!"

The Dutchman, unconscious of menace, looked into his new quarry's distorted features with deep interest. He had never seen anything quite so horrible, even at moving picture shows. As he drew forth a small and exquisitely mounted revolver, his eyes opened wide like a child who has found an unsuspected treasure.

"I thought so. Keep it," nodded Randolph, lowering his own weapon. With a groan of relief, Martel let his arms fall heavily to his sides.

Now the American began drawing off his gloves. It was a slow process, for they were soaked with rain. He still kept his eyes upon Martel, but his expression changed slightly. A frown came, and he appeared to be deliberating.

At last both slender, virile hands were bare, and in the right, folded together lengthwise, were the heavy driving gloves. He moved forward, as if reluctantly. Martel, flattened against the wall, watched him with the glittering eyes of a cornered rat.

Within a few feet of him Randolph halted and gave a slow, dragging look from the quaking knees upward. At the man's eyes his own shrank as if in nausea. He stretched out his clean, bare hands, glancing at first one and then the other. "God!" he broke out with a great shudder. "I cannot do it. I cannot be polluted by the touch of such a creature!"

With the wet gloves he gave Martel a terrific blow

across the mouth, and then flinging them toward the creature as he fell, turned and went over to Ariadne.

"Come, my poor darling. Come, my little bruised white rose," he whispered, kneeling down beside her and trying to gather her up into his arms. She sank from him, limp and inert as one newly dead.

Big Jan stood over them for a moment, then strode to the main door, took down the bars, and without further ceremony burst it entirely away. He came back, touched Randolph on the shoulder, and held out arms like oak-branches.

The Virginian hesitated. It was hard to relinquish so precious a burden even for a moment, but the road outside was dark and slippery and he knew that the kindly giant would have a surer footing. He gave her up to Jan, first replacing the blue motor-bonnet that now had no long strings, and the three passed out together without a backward glance toward the prostrate body of Martel.

Randolph entered the car first, and Jan laid the girl in his arms, remaining beside them until he had received the signal for starting back. Ariadne's unconsciousness persisted for so long a time that the young man became desperately alarmed. He called her name imploringly, chafing and slapping her wrists as he had seen people do upon the stage. The dark bulk of Jan's body leaned nearer.

"Water — Jan — water!"

"*Ja — water,*" echoed the large one, speeding off to fill his cap.

The still, white face was bathed and mopped in vain. "Good God!" sobbed Randolph. "Has the beast killed her with sheer fright!"

Suddenly Jan had an inspiration. He tossed up the



flap of his long coat, dug down in his great Dutch trousers almost, it would seem, to his boot-tops, and drew forth a flask of Holland gin.

"Splendid — splendid!" cried Randy, as his trembling fingers closed about it. He got a few drops between her pale lips. She moaned and choked a little, and her eyelids flickered once.

"It is all right, Jan — all right. You've saved her," breathed the American ecstatically. He was having hard work to keep back tears of relief.

"*Ja, is goed!*" gulped Jan, and before climbing up to his seat, raised the restoring flask and nearly emptied it.

By this the rain and wind were spent. Somewhere up among still wildly driven clouds a moon was hiding. Her light came fitfully, a lamp behind tossed, gray curtains, but the young Dutchman knew his road.

Storm-driven as the clouds by his hours of agonized emotion, Randolph leaned back heavily, knowing that each moment of the rushing air was deepening Ariadne's consciousness. What would she think in finding herself so closely in his arms? He did not dare to speak. Life and warmth came to her slowly. He, too, was spent — weakened and hurt by the hideous ordeal. He almost wished that she could lie here quietly until his dazed mind cleared, until he could think out what next was to be done. Her face, with its closed eyes, shone in the semi-darkness like a white cyclamen against dark leaves.

"Randy," the voice was from very far away.

"Yes, darling. It is Randy."

"You — you heard again. You came," she whispered and hid her eyes.

"Yes, dear, I came. You are mine now — my

own forever. Nothing in heaven or hell shall take you from me after this," he began passionately, and then, because he was a true lover, added, in a lowered tone of pleading: "that is, if you can care."

"Care for you — care!" murmured the girl. "Oh, Randy!" He felt an arm steal up around his neck.

"You love me? I — I — can't believe it. It is too wonderful," he stammered, his voice breaking on a note of joy. "Of course I love you; I have adored you from the moment you turned your eyes toward me there, beside the Vyver."

The girl lifted her head with a sort of beautiful pride. "And I have loved you — you only — since we stood together under the cherry-tree."

He caught her back to his heart, and in the speeding darkness their lips met in a first long kiss.

"And you are willing to marry me, my darling?"

"Yes, yes!"

Again more kisses, and then he commanded masterfully: "It must be soon — at once — do you hear me, Ariadne?"

"Yes, Randy, it shall be, if I can. You know that I wish it."

"There's no 'if' to be considered. You are not to spend another night under the roof with either of those vile creatures."

"Don't, don't recall them," she shivered. "I cannot — bear — it — Randy."

The sudden drop in her voice and the heaviness with which again she hung in his arms should have warned him; but the lover, himself strung to the breaking point, thought only of the moment's issue.

"You are my affianced wife now, Ariadne," he persisted, "and as such I shall protect you even against

yourself. You shall be taken to a different hotel — Ariadne, Ariadne, what is it? Can't you speak, darling? Can't you hear me?"

But the girl's spirit, caught for a few bright moments in the lure of happiness, had again taken flight; and during the remainder of the long drive the man sat cold with despair clasping, as he thought, the deserted temple of a love that his own impassioned violence had slain.

## CHAPTER, VII

NEXT morning all the Doelen knew that the fair American girl had been caught out in the terrific thunderstorm of the night before, and was now lying ill in bed because of the shock of it. They knew, too, that the young American with the brown eyes and the lean pleasant face was much concerned. Already he had talked long and confidentially with the *portier*. He had sent a note to the invalid's room with a great sheaf of white roses.

Gossip spreads quickly among the servants of a hotel. It was the young American, they said, who had found the disabled car and brought Miss Skipwith home. Mr. Martel and his chauffeur preferred to remain with their machine, a very expensive, hired one, until they could see just how much damage had been done.

"The queerest part of all," confided one small "buttons" to another, "is that Marie Vart, chambermaid on the second floor, says that Madame Martel came in alone, many hours earlier."

"What lies are those I hear?" cried the little *portier*, darting upon them. His mild eyes flashed, his gray hair seemed to stand up in bristles. The small boys shrank and looked about for hiding places.

"Tschth! Such foolish chattering in a respectable hotel! Send that Marie Vart to me!"

Ariadne lay white and silent in her little bed. So she had lain ever since her frightened stepmother, assisted by Cummins, had undressed and placed her there.

To Mrs. Martel's torrent of questions she had been unable to make a single reply.

"Better let 'er be, Ma'am," advised Cummins. "The poor dear 'aven't the strength to talk. I never saw a chalkier. You go to bed, Ma'am, and I'll sit 'ere by the window till day breaks and we can 'ave in a doctor."

"But my husband, Cummins; I am not thinking only of her. Mr. Martel hasn't come back yet. You know for yourself how easily he takes cold, how delicate is his throat. I can't sleep a minute until he returns. It does seem to me that now Ariadne is safe in her bed with no bones broken she might rouse herself to tell me just where she left Connie, and how his poor nerves stood the shock of the storm." The anxious wife gazed plaintively but also with irritation toward the inert figure lying so still. There was no hint of motion. "And that rude young man, Randolph Carr," the speaker went on fretfully. "Of course it was Providence that he happened to be driving along the same road, and I am grateful to him for bringing Miss Skipwith back, but he need not have brushed me aside when I inquired about my husband. The only thing he would say when I asked so often was: 'The man is quite uninjured.' He didn't even have the manners to say Mr. Martel."

"'E told you what you most wanted to know, Ma'am, didn't 'e, then?" observed Cummins.

"Oh, I suppose so. But I wanted to hear particulars. Connie is so unused to anything like hardships. And that valet of his can't be found anywhere. I suppose he has gone in search of his master. I never could endure François myself. But I must say he is devoted to Mr. Martel."

Finally she went off to her room. Cummins remained on duty till a bell-boy summoned her to her mistress' bedchamber. Mrs. Martel's prophecy of sleeplessness had evidently been fulfilled. The maid found her sitting in a chair, with her head thrown back; she was apparently in great physical pain.

"Lor! Ma'am," cried the maid in genuine alarm. "You are as white as Miss Skipwith now — all but the purple spots. 'Ave you been took in the night?"

"It is nothing. Only I am worried sick about Mr. Martel. What can be keeping him like this?"

"Sure 'e's sleeping away in some Dutch 'ole till the night is over, Ma'am; there's nothing to worry over in it."

"Hasn't Ariadne spoken yet? Hasn't she told you any more particulars?"

"She 'aven't spoken or moved the night through. You ought to 'ave the doctor to her."

"Yes, of course. Dress me as fast as you can, Cummins, and then tell the porter to send for a good doctor — one who can speak English."

One might have supposed that the little *portier* kept physicians up his sleeve, so quickly did this one appear. He came puffing up the stairs and into the sick room, a small, stout person — so solid, so round and so unmistakably Dutch that he might almost have been built up of cheeses. There were kindly brown eyes in the Kaase which served him for a head. Mrs. Martel opened the door to him. She held out her hand. As he bowed and then lifted his eyes to her face, he said instantly:

"Yes, Madame — she is ill, ja?"

"No, no, it is my daughter — my stepdaughter — there on the bed."

"Ah — the young miss — she is ill, ja?" This good doctor evidently preferred to treat sickness lightly.

"Can you see her? Shall I raise the shade a little?" asked Mrs. Martel, moving toward the window. At his nod she lifted her hand to the cord. At that same instant the sound of a motor coming toward the hotel caused her to look out.

"There he is — my husband!" she screamed. "I must go to him."

"But, Madame," exclaimed the little Dutchman, bewildered, "the young miss cannot speak; I must have some other —"

"I will send Cummins, my maid," cried Mrs. Martel, hurrying past him. "I'll come back myself in a very little while, but I must see my husband first."

The doctor stared after her a moment. Then, shaking his head at the queer ways of these Americans, he turned his entire attention to his patient. He felt her pulse, listened to the beating of her heart and then to her breathing. First one eyelid was lifted and then the other. The girl gave no recognition of his presence.

"Are you of the pain, my miss?" he asked. No answer came. Again, and even more gently, he questioned, and after a pause made a third attempt. Now the girl managed to whisper "No."

"Ach — dot is goot — goot," he said cheerily.

Cummins entered, and he received her cordially. "Now, coom, tell me vat you know is make her like dis — all — all dead — like so." He lifted his arms and let them fall lifeless at his sides.

Cummins, with her British lack of volubility, told him the main facts. Her personal conjectures were withheld. The doctor looked more puzzled than ever. He turned back to his patient, and his fat fingers were

deep in her hair. He was feeling carefully, with that wonderful sense of touch which is in itself a sort of vision, for an undiscovered fracture, when Mrs. Martel hurried into the room.

Again she was panting, and her curious greenish pallor, dashed with spots of purple, gave her the look of a comic mask through which pale, prominent eyes stared wildly.

"My husband is back at last, Doctor. Oh, they had a terrible time. He is almost as unnerved as Ariadne here. I've been begging and begging him to see you, Doctor. He ought to have attention, I am sure. But he simply won't hear of it. You know how men are. But his eyes look awful and —"

"One stop — please, Madam, I mus' request. De young miss here. She already my patient is. Did your hoosband says dat she —"

"It was the merest accident, Doctor — and then the storm coming on which prevented the Dutch chauffeur from mending the machinery or whatever it was that went wrong. Of course I don't know anything about that. But Mr. Martel would not have had it happen for worlds. He is always so careful, so considerate."

The doctor waved his fat arms in the air. "Madame, I must request to know — did the young miss fall down — make a hurt of herself — strike de head — so?" He butted at the bed for illustration. His listener at last seemed to grasp his meaning.

"No, no, indeed. It was not that sort of an accident. She is only sick from fright."

"Haf she been frightened much always of de motor drive?"

"Oh, no. She is accustomed to them. She likes driving. It was breaking down in that lonely road



with nothing but marshes all around. That must have been it. Ariadne has always been terribly afraid of lightning. Why anything might have happened to them out there — robbers or bandits —” She chattered on, the doctor allowing the fluttering strands of speech to blow past him. She had given at least one clew — the lightning.

Again he lifted Ariadne’s eyelids and gazed in her face with deep thought.

“De lightning. Ja. Perhaps if she fear much —” He turned his face again to this stepmother. “Did de lightning dat motor struck?”

“I don’t think so. No, I am sure it didn’t. But some of the bolts came very close, Mr. Martel says. Even he was a little alarmed. Oh, Doctor, I do wish he would let you see him.”

The doctor rose from his seat by the bed and drew out a prescription pad.

“If eet is but de nerve crash in your daughter, I will give some medicine to help soon. She mus’ be keep very still. No great talk to her, please, no visitor at all. She must be keep still and no noise, not even question; how goes now, mein kindt? Do painful stop? Noting — not-ing I say — or —” He put his hand to his forehead and lowering his voice to a dramatic whisper — “dis — de head inside may coom very badly.”

“I shall be in and out of the room, Doctor,” said Cummins quietly.

“Ja — dat is a goot woman. You do not talk. Let your young miss sleep and be still. Do not touch or speak but to give de medicine as I write.”

The doctor went from the room and down the stairs with surprising swiftness. Cummins felt that he had done so to avoid the topic of Mr. Martel.

Donna went over to the bed, looking down full into the girl's face. Cummins whispered a caution against speaking, at which the other frowned a little and shook her head, as if to say: "Why caution me? I am the last person to need it."

Ariadne's long hair had not been braided. It flowed back from her flower-white face, leaving a little golden promontory at each temple. At the top of the forehead it grew downward in a thicker point. The pure modeling of her face and the straight, silken line of the eyebrows had always been among her greatest beauties. Now, with her lids close shut and the long, dark lashes fringing them, her curved lips helpless and in some way strangely pathetic in their unconsciousness of scrutiny, she seemed even to Mrs. Martel's unclassical and unimaginative mind like a nymph asleep in a dusky wood. Pursued by some dark, mythologic shade, she had at last found refuge, and had here fallen, her young strength spent, waiting for the kindly essences of earth to comfort and revive her.

For a long time the elder woman stood there, silently gazing, then without a word to Cummins, left the room.

When Randolph's sheaf of roses came, the maid, with more delicacy than could have been expected, placed the flowers in a large vase, where Ariadne, stretching out a hand however languid, could not have failed to touch them. His sealed letter she placed on a small table. But all through that day the girl lay in a sort of cool stupor, swallowing at intervals with great difficulty the liquid that Doctor Bergen had prescribed.

Her stepmother inquired often about her, but did not go to the room again until evening.

Martel was in a mood so black and wordless, so impatient of questions or approach, that the poor soul

could do little but crouch in her own chamber, listening for the impatient striding up and down next door. Such spells of restlessness were followed by intervals of silence even more dreadful to endure. Neither went down-stairs to luncheon, but the meals were served in their separate apartments.

In the middle of the afternoon, the wretched wife, fearing that she might lose control of her nerves unless she could see and speak with him, knocked timidly on his door. No answer came. She knocked again, then tried to turn the knob. The door was fastened.

"Connie — Connie," she whispered. No answer. "Connie," she called aloud for the first time, and her voice broke in a little shriek. She heard him crossing the floor; a great trembling seized her. "Please go away, Donna," he said, not unkindly.

"I must see you for one moment, dearest. I can't stand this any longer. I am suffering, too. Let me in just a minute."

He hesitated, then drew back the bolt. As she entered, his back was already turned to her, and he moved toward the easy chair where he had been sitting.

The intruder told herself that she must be very calm and tactful — that she must do nothing to jar nerves already overstrung. Perhaps the girl up-stairs would be the safest topic.

"I only wanted to tell you, dear, that Ariadne is doing quite well."

He made no sound.

"She hasn't spoken yet; and the doctor says that she must be kept very still. It was the lightning, of course, that gave her this dreadful shock."

Still he remained motionless and did not speak. She

came a little closer and said even more timidly: "And how are you feeling now, dearest?"

He roused himself wearily. "There has never been anything wrong with me. I told you so before."

"Now you simply must not worry any more, darling. Both of you are safe and sound. I don't suppose the accident to the car will amount to much."

"Not much."

"Then why not try to forget all about it. Let us take a little walk in the fresh air, or a drive. Just a short drive. We needn't go the same road."

A sudden twist came to his lips, giving them the black mockery of a smile.

"I don't feel up to that, Donna."

"What I've never been able to understand," she began in her more usual voice, "is how that young man ever happened to be on the same road, and in a storm, too."

Martel clinched a hidden hand. The purple veins showed in his forehead, but he preserved a low, even tone as he answered: "I don't want to discuss it further for the present."

Mrs. Martel, still on her feet, sighed and gave a despairing gesture.

"Then you want to stay here alone, without me, without anybody —"

"Yes, but I will come down to dinner to-night at eight."

She moved heavily toward the door. The dragging feeling at one side made her long to bend, to yield, but she drew herself up, ignoring the pain, and tried to walk lightly as a young woman walks. She might have spared herself, for her husband's brooding eyes were again fixed on the floor.

It was some compensation, at least, that he would

join her at dinner. She took great pride and joy in their infrequent tête-à-têtes in public. That evening her toilet was made with extraordinary attention to the details, and she bade Cummins fetch one of Ariadne's white roses for her hair. She was in the dining-room at eight. A few moments later Mr. Martel entered, as faultlessly dressed as usual.

She smiled a welcome and congratulated him upon his smart appearance.

"Now all you need to make you simply perfect," she simpered, "is a flower in your buttonhole. Here, take this white rose." She reached up to disengage it from her hair, but he checked her with a gesture. "Don't deprive yourself. It looks well there."

"Does it?" she said in delight. Even so faint a hint of praise made heaven for the instant. "Somehow I felt that I needed a flower, just there among the puffs, and I stole one of Ariadne's."

"Ariadne's! Where did she —" he began. A slow, deep flush mounted along his neck and up into his face.

Mrs. Martel bit her lip, she remembered too late. Excuses would only make her error worse. She began a feverish prattle about nothing. Martel recovered himself and at intervals gave some obvious reply, but he ate nothing, only drank — not champagne merely, but brandy, and after that liqueurs.

It was not often that he showed the influence of drink, but to-night his face slowly grew a deep crimson, his eyes, half-closed under swelling lids, gleamed like those of a caged python, and Donna was thankful when at last he rose and said he was going at once to his room.

Before undressing, Donna made one more laborious pilgrimage to Ariadne, up-stairs.

"Go get your dinner, Cummins; I will sit here in your place. How does Miss Ariadne seem?"

"She looks a good bit better to me," said the maid judicially. There's som'at can be called color in 'er lips now — but not much."

"Has she been talking at all?"

"No more than you 'ear now, Ma'am."

"Didn't the doctor come again about four?"

"For a moment," replied the servant. "He didn't change nothing. Her pulse was a little better, he said."

"He's coming again in the morning, isn't he?"

"At nine o'clock, 'e says." At the doorway, Cummins turned. "I 'ope you won't think anything if I take it on myself to say, Ma'am, that you ought to let the doctor look you over; your color is awful bad."

Donna sat on alone. For months past she had tried to gather courage to see a doctor. The distortion of her figure and the pain were both on the increase. As Ariadne had once noted, her face and throat and arms were becoming meagre, while her body grew heavier and more distended every day. She belonged to that class of women whose instinct it is to summon specialists for the least hint of illness in those they love, but who obstinately refuse the same offices for themselves. But Cummins was right. The time had come when she must have an expert opinion upon her case. Perhaps in the morning, if Ariadne were much better, she would speak of herself to the funny, little, round doctor.

That night the old *portier* sent up a small folding cot for Cummins. It was so arranged that the maid could see the face of the sick girl. The doctor had said to let his patient sleep through the night without medicine. Cummins, being weary from the previous vigil, fell almost instantaneously into unconsciousness and did

not wake until some time after the twittering of sparrows announced full daylight.

She opened her eyes quickly, and her first look was toward the other bed. The girl's face was turned sidewise on the pillow; one hand moved among the roses. Her eyes, looking immense and black in the semi-darkness, were opened upon the flowers. Her lips, where the color was now unmistakable, smiled at them.

Cummins got to her feet. "There now, Miss Ariadne, dearie. You do be like yourself again."

"What day is it, Cummins?"

"What day? Lor, Miss, it's a Monday, I believe. You did give us a fright."

"I'm going to try not to think of it, Cummins. I'm very glad I wasn't ill more than a day."

"We don't know about that yet, Miss. Wait and see what the doctor says about it."

"Why, yes, there was a doctor, wasn't there? I couldn't be quite sure. Everything seemed so queer and far away."

"E's to come at nine o'clock. Bless me, it's after seven now. I must go down and see to Mrs. Martel's tea."

"Let in a little more light, Cummins. I want to see the sparrows and the trees."

"I don't know as I should," said Cummins doubtfully; she lifted the shade by inches, and at every jerk of the string looked around to see the effect on Ariadne. There was no shrinking in the girl's clear eyes.

"Up to the top, please. How blue the sky is."

She was not thinking altogether of the sky. One hand was fingering the roses, leaves and blossoms.

"Ere's a letter come for you yesterday," said the maid, handing it to her.

"Oh — oh — for me?"

Cummins hurried out, her somewhat stolid British countenance irradiating satisfaction.

Ariadne did not open her letter all at once. The effort of the outstretched hand and the little flicker of excitement had tired her. It was enough just to hold the precious thing on her breast: to lie there, knowing she possessed it: to be still and safe and feeling the faint perfume of his flowers creeping up to her. Flight and blackness were behind her; she need not think of them any more. This was her dawn and this her first wakening into paradise. The blessed moments slipped away, bearing her along, and she was conscious of a sweet longing to float in this tranquil ether for many hours. But this, of course, would be impossible.

Cummins would be back soon — and perhaps Madonna. Then the little, rotund, half-remembered doctor was to return; and the precious letter was still unread. She opened it at last. "My own True-love." She kissed the old-fashioned words and loved him evermore for writing them:

"I send these roses to one purer and more exquisite. But, at least, you speak the same language, and they will tell you all the things I long to say. Send me a message just as soon as you can see me.

"Until death, and after,

"Your

"RANDOLPH."

It was not a long letter, but what more was there to say? She rested her cheek upon it, dreaming: then again took it out and read. Why should anything else in the world matter, now that she had won such a love?



Feet were heard on the outer stair. She hastily put away the precious page.

Cummins entered, smiling, with a second note and another armful of roses. These also appeared at first glance to be white, but as the girl bent her face to them she saw that in the center of each a faint blush clung. How well indeed could roses speak for him! The first for tenderness — now these with dawn in their hearts. "To-morrow," she whispered, and grew pinker than the deepest center, "to-morrow they will be all the color of a new day!"

She had not opened her second letter when Doctor Bergen entered. His rosy face, subdued to professional concern, quickly broadened at the sight of her.

"Ach. Goot — goot!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together and nodding at Cummins. He took up the girl's pulse, nearly overturning the flowers in so doing. As she reached out the other hand to steady them, a flood of color swept into her face.

"It is goot!" he repeated with more emphasis, his small brown eyes twinkling.

"It was but the nerves of the miss — the medicine bottle — chut! You throw him out — so. She mus' rest a day — just to-day perhaps — and she must eat. Ja, much, much eat. Shocolat, mellek, bisquit — and much eiren — what you say — Ja! Egg — the product of hen."

Ariadne was laughing by this time.

"Ja, you laugh. It is goot, too."

"Shall she have a bit o' broth, sir?"

"Brodt? Ja, ja, soup — much soup — an later if she wish, some fowl."

"Can I get out of bed, Doctor?"

At that he became thoughtful. The broad oval of his face returned to its original circle.

"Not too fast for dat — my young lady. By noon time you can put on de cloak and sit near your leetle window there. To-morrow you will be — ach — so strong again. Den you go out to little walk — by the Vyver."

"Yes, I will go to the Vyver," she repeated, flushing once more.

"An' now you will throw out the old doctor, ja?" He beamed again, spreading his fat hands in a humorous gesture.

"There is one thing more I want to ask you, please — Doctor."

"Ja, my little miss."

"Cummins, go down now and see if Mrs. Martel can see him at once." When the maid had left the room, she said to the doctor earnestly: "I am very much worried about my stepmother, Doctor."

"Ja?" he said, but his tone was no longer jovial. It seemed to her that he avoided meeting her eyes.

"Yesterday she came up here and was in such pain that she promised Cummins she would ask you to visit her. We are both sure that something is really wrong. Will you go?"

"If she call, I must go. It is for that I am doctor — Artz — ja." He spoke with resignation rather than professional enthusiasm. Cummins returned, saying that Mrs. Martel was in her room and would be glad to see the doctor there.

He bade Ariadne good-by, holding her hand with fatherly kindness. Cummins remained standing in the door. As the little round man followed her, he gave a final jovial nod and smile to the young patient

who no longer needed him. For some reason, the simple tableau — the vision of Cummins' sturdy back, with her face half turned over her shoulder, the cheese-like redness and rotundity of the doctor's countenance surmounted by its twinkling smile, remained in the girl's memory, a tangible, a painful image.

When the door closed upon it, she fell back to her dreaming. Randolph's letter was longer and dearer than the other had been. And in it was a hint of impatience. He must see her. What did the doctor say? Did she wish him to demand an interview? He felt that he could not wait much longer.

She sighed a little at such sentences. Life was tugging at her once more. Returning strength brought its own penalty, keener perceptions. It was not so easy now to keep dark memories at bay.

"I must have something to eat," she thought. "Then I shall be strong enough to write to him."

She pressed the electric button by her bed twice. Cummins did not answer, but the ordinary hotel maid appeared. Ariadne had her place a little stand with ink, pens, and paper beside the bed, and then asked for chocolate and rolls.

For two hours no one came. She had finished her note and had it sealed and waiting until Cummins should return. She felt she could trust the English servant to give it to the *portier*, who would see to its delivery.

When Cummins came, she had another tray of food. "You must have nourishment every two 'ours, Miss," she said.

"Oh, Cummins, where have you been so long? What did the doctor say about Madonna? Is she worse?"

"Mrs. Martel 'aven't told me what 'e said," was Cummins' answer. Her face was dull and rather surly.

The kindness she had shown during Ariadne's brief illness was evidently now to be discarded.

The invalid sighed. Cummins had been almost human. Perhaps there had been some scene with Madonna or an encounter with the hated François. At the thought of the valet the girl shuddered. Again she saw the lifted cap, the eyes freed from their goggles slanted round at her. Of course he and his master were back in the hotel.

Cummins had taken up the empty chocolate tray and was leaving, when Ariadne called to her.

"Won't you take this note to the little *portier* and ask him to see that it is delivered?"

The woman seemed to hesitate. A darker look came to her face.

"Yes, I'll give it to 'im," she finally said.

"And Cummins — please —" But Cummins was already on the stair.

The girl ate her creamed toast and drank the large glass of "mellek," taking no pleasure in them. Each moment brought an increase of vitality and of troubled thoughts. She almost wished she were not getting well so fast. Why didn't Madonna come? It was nearly noon. Then an intense longing to see her lover — to feel the strain of his arms around her — made the girl toss restlessly. "I won't lie here any more," she told herself. "If Cummins won't come to me, I can get on my slippers and my wrapper alone. I must go to the window."

Once on her feet she realized that she was still very weak and was thankful to sink down in the easy chair.

Cummins came up with a beautifully arranged luncheon; on the tray was a small glass of white clove

pinks. "The old porter sent them. He saw to your letter, Miss," the maid exclaimed.

She made no comment upon Ariadne's abandonment of the bed. Only by her instinct of service she went to it, throwing back the sheets and tidying the pillows. Ariadne longed to question her, but something in the woman's look checked her.

As she was about to pass through the door, she paused and said :

"Mrs. Martel is dressed now ; she is coming up after her luncheon."

This statement brought great relief. If Donna were well enough to climb the stairs again, everything must be all right. The girl ate her lunch, and recollecting that Donna would need the one easy chair, got back to the bed, where she propped herself upright with pillows.

The waiting was long, but finally the sound of slow, dragging footsteps could be heard. Mrs. Martel opened the door and leaned there a moment, exhausted. The light of the one window fell on her misshapen body and her twitching face.

## CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE she realized it, Ariadne was on her feet with one arm round the sagging figure.

Donna patted her hand and tried to smile. "So you are all right again, my dear. I am glad."

The girl led her to the chair, and when the woman was seated, remained stooping over her.

Mrs. Martel moved restlessly. "I can't stand that sunshine," she fretted. "Pull the blind down, Ariadne, and then you must get back to bed, so you won't catch cold."

The girl obeyed but kept her troubled eyes always on her stepmother. There was something different, almost a dignity in the sick woman, in spite of the usual high-pitched, peevish tones.

"You are quite all right again, Doctor Bergen tells me." Yes, there was dignity and a curious, terrifying restraint.

"Oh, there's nothing more to worry about in me. I am to dress and go out just as usual to-morrow. But Madonna, I'm so glad you let the doctor come to you. Please tell me what he said."

A shiver passed over the seated figure. "Oh, nothing very much; I don't want to talk about myself. Do you think you are strong enough to discuss plans a little?"

"Of course I am. Is it — is it — leaving the Hague?"

Mrs. Martel nodded. "Connie wants to go at once. He suggests Aix les Bains. But there are reasons why I should — why I want to go to another place."

"Then why can't he take his servant and start at once for France, if he wishes it? You and I can stop on here or go anywhere else that you prefer."

For the moment even Randolph was forgotten. The habit of years told in a crisis. She must be with her stepmother, especially now in this mental stress. Something very special indeed must be bearing on that weak, devoted mind and heart if she hesitated to follow her husband when he beckoned.

"Things are difficult all round just now. Even the money question is a problem. We can hardly afford to travel separately. Almost the last dollar of our income has had to go to help meet that debt of Connie's in Paris. There hasn't been time to hear from Judge Henry. If he would only cable the money."

Mrs. Martel clasped and unclasped her hands nervously; her weak chin trembled.

"Where is it you'd like to move, Madonna?"

"To London. There is some one I must see there — a—a specialist?"

"Did Doctor Bergen advise you to a specialist?"

"Yes — yes, I must see him. I must be certain!" She was fighting back hysteria as she spoke. She swallowed hard, gave a long, shuddering sigh that was half a sob, and went on more steadily: "Doctor Bergen thinks it may be something serious; of course he isn't sure. Doctors are always making mistakes. He says so himself. I never thought much of doctors, anyway, and his English is so poor, maybe I didn't quite understand him. But I—I—can't go on being uncertain. I must see this specialist. The address is here," — she showed a small visiting card. Ariadne had not noticed that she held it.

The girl got out of bed and knelt at her stepmother's

side. Donna held out the card, and Ariadne read, murmuring the words aloud. The name, unmistakably English, with an address in Harley Street had for her no special significance.

"He is the greatest — one of the very greatest — authorities on certain troubles. He — he could tell at once. And I must know it, Ariadne; I must know before it is too late."

"Poor Madonna!" said the girl, putting an arm around the bowed, misshapen body. "Don't tremble so; of course we will go to London. Mr. Martel's plans — anybody's plans — must be put aside."

The unhappy woman clung to her stepdaughter. "Oh, Ariadne, what would I do without you? You are the only safe thing I have in the whole world. Thank God you are with me!"

"Yes — yes," said the girl soothingly, "you know you can rely on me. We will go to the specialist; and when we find that nothing at all is wrong, we will both laugh at having been so frightened."

"Connie must not dream the real reason of the trip, Ariadne. He would turn from me. You know how he hates disease and ugliness. If he knew I even feared this hideous, hideous thing — Oh, I cannot bear it, Ariadne! What have I done that God should afflict me like this? I haven't been a bad woman."

She had broken down completely and was sobbing and clinging to the frail young figure desperately. Ariadne felt her own strength ebbing. The room became a gray, whirling mist. She bit her lips furiously.

"Tell me everything, Madonna. You need me to share it with you. You can trust me."

"Oh, it is so terrible, I cannot speak it. Swear to me, Ariadne, swear here on your knees, in God's name,



that you will not, even by a hint, let any other living creature suspect it — at any rate not till I have been to London and am sure."

"I swear it, dear; I won't betray it even by a hint."

The woman's head drooped forward. The one whispered word seemed to congeal every drop of blood in the girl's body. Then a great shuddering wave of compassion shook her.

"Oh, you poor soul, my poor Madonna! It can't be that. I won't believe it. Of course we must go to London. We should cross by to-morrow night's boat. For once you must insist, you must defy Mr. Martel's wishes. Nothing else can count beside a thing like this. What will you tell him, though? What excuse can you make to him?"

"I haven't thought yet. Perhaps it will come. Only I must do it in my own way. You must not interfere, Ariadne."

"With him," said the girl, and at the words her first consciousness of this new and awful bondage came to her.

And Randolph, her lover? Who was to send pink roses in the morning? Who was to meet her beside the Vyver? What of Randolph?

She crawled back to the bed and threw herself face downward.

Donna began to talk swiftly. "You are a dear child, Ariadne. No daughter could be more to me. You mustn't feel so badly about it. Perhaps it is only a nightmare, after all. If only I can keep the truth from Connie — if we can keep the servants from suspecting. I'm trying to be brave, and I won't believe it's that horrible thing the Dutch doctor fears. I can be brave, Ariadne, and keep up until that other terrible ordeal

in London. If only I can be sure that no other human creature knows what I fear. You have promised me that — I am content. I know you keep your promises."

Ariadne gave a groan.

"I'm going to my own room now, dear. It's bad for you to have me talking like this. I didn't intend to tell you, Ariadne. I thought I would be strong enough to hold it back, but you drew it from me. I am glad now. Already you have helped me. But try not to worry about it any more. We must both of us be strong if we are to take the night boat to-morrow."

She came to the bed, leaning over, and it was her heart too that reached down to the still figure lying there. With an impulse of affection not usual to her she kissed the girl's hot cheek, and murmuring "I could not stand it without you, Ariadne," went down-stairs.

The girl lay on for hours, motionless; but now it was no perfumed barge beneath her — but the stark structure of a rack.

Mr. Martel, immediately after luncheon, had given François orders to begin repacking and had then gone out into the streets. When his wife knocked at his door, the valet opened it. She saw the preparations for departure and without comment turned away. Her moments of self-abandonment to the girl up-stairs had brought her a strange, new energy, almost a hope. She rang the bell sharply, and when Cummins entered, said to her:

"We are leaving to-morrow night. François is already at work. I think you had better begin, too."

Cummins stood rooted to the spot. An obstinate, swollen look came to her face. "And which of these dirty foreign 'oles is it to be next, Ma'am?"

"You needn't stick out your mouth like that, Cum-

mins," her mistress remarked severely. "This time it is — London."

Cummins refused to surrender her sourest expression at once.

"And are you certain of that, Ma'am? 'As 'e" — she nodded toward the next room — "said it was to be London?"

"Miss Ariadne and I are going, whether Mr. Martel does or not."

This time Cummins was convinced. Her grim look vanished. "Then I'll be setting to work this minute, Ma'am, and I may say that I'll be putting more 'eart in it than I 'ave for this year past."

The two women worked cheerfully; Ariadne was forgotten. Donna's mood of exhilaration was still on when about teatime Martel strolled in.

"I see you are at it," was his comment.

"Yes, dearest, and I think it will be nice to have our tea served in here. Then I won't have to stop so long."

He consented. She hastily caught up a mass of silk and spangles from the easiest chair. Cummins vanished to order tea, and the man looked about with some complacency.

"You have done a good deal already."

"Yes, haven't we?"

"Will the girl up-stairs be ready to take a morning train?"

"I'm not sure about a morning one," Donna fenced. "But she will certainly be strong enough during the day. She's quite herself now. The doctor is not coming again."

Martel drew off his gloves. "You had the Dutchman in, too, didn't you?"

Her face was averted as she replied: "Yes, Cummins and Ariadne insisted on it."

He gave his low laugh that always had the undernote of mockery.

"Well, you look better for his call. It's curious how even the sight of a man calling himself a doctor influences you women. You are always imagining absurdities about yourselves."

"I suppose we are," admitted his wife, who had resisted seeing a physician until forced into it.

Martel surveyed her as she moved around the room.

"You really should do something for that increasing embonpoint, you know. You are positively deformed."

"I know it, dear," she said plaintively, "and I am planning right now to try and get rid of it. In fact, Connie darling, that is the reason —"

"There are the best hot baths in the world at Aix," he broke in, if anything so languid as his voice could be said to break into another's speech. As usual it checked her instantly. "I saw to that, you know" — the impromptu lie came easily — "it was one of my motives for deciding on Aix. I shall send François soon for the tickets and a reserved compartment."

The woman felt that she must assert herself. She paused in her work. Her large, pallid face took on an expression of distress.

"But, Connie," she begun, when the servant entered with the tea, and welcoming the respite, she busied herself serving it. "All men," she reflected hopefully, "are more willing to listen after they have been fed."

Martel permitted her ministrations and even condescended to praise the food. Husband and wife being alone, now was indubitably the chance to speak.

"I — I hope I'm not going to vex you, dearest," she

began timidly. The man gave an imperceptible frown and was instantly on his guard, ready to oppose whatever her next statement might be. "You know how seldom I go against any suggestion of yours."

"What of it?"

"Only, dear, it happens this time I am very anxious not to go to Aix."

"And your objection?"

"Oh, I haven't anything that you could call an objection," she hastened to assure him. "It is only that until Judge Henry sends us that money, we can't afford to travel separately."

"Well — I expected to take you along."

"And, and, dear Connie, there is another place where I must — that is where I want to go —"

"Not America?" he said quickly.

"Oh, no, indeed. This is no distance at all; it is only to London."

"The next thing to America, and you know it. Now understand me once for all, Donna. I shall not consent to bore myself with London at this time of the year."

"Oh, Connie, try to be reasonable about it. We may not need to stay long."

"I don't follow you. What need is in question? What has started up this idea of London so suddenly?" His suspicions, reaching out, caught first at the thought of Carr and Ariadne.

This must be Carr's doing; but how could he have had a chance of influencing Donna? The poor soul's utter servility to his wishes seldom gave a margin for surprises. Martel found the situation mildly interesting. Whatever the plea, he could demolish it with a little effort, and if Ariadne's wishes were involved, her disappointment would add a further zest.

He placed one elbow on the table, lounging back with half-closed eyes. She stood before him, her loose-skinned hands clasping and unclasping, her lips moving spasmodically to find the right words.

"I realize that it does sound sudden, Connie. When you first spoke of Aix, I didn't mind going there, you know I didn't. But when the doctor came, he found that there was a little something wrong — my heart is not quite as it should be, Connie. It is my heart that has been giving me pain and makes this effect of flesh."

The man laughed. "Nonsense, you must try a better one than that. The idea of a person's heart making them fat. You eat and drink too much; that's the real trouble. The baths I spoke of are for people with exactly your complaint."

"Don't try to laugh it away. It is serious, Connie," she insisted. There was a note of sincerity that he could not overlook.

"I am to believe that a jabbering Dutchman has tried to frighten you into thinking yourself ill?"

"He was very careful, he did not try to frighten me. Only, the things he said and the kind of questions he asked made me see that he knew what he was talking about."

"If he knows what he is talking about, why doesn't he cure you?"

"Because, if he is right, it is one of those things where you have to consult an authority. Doctor Bergen says he cannot take the responsibility. He insists upon my going to London."

"Do you realize what fees these English specialists ask?"

"We can't think of that, Connie. The money must be found, some way. Even if it takes a lot, it will be

better than that I should die and you be left without —" she broke off abruptly. Her frightened face showed that she had gone further than she intended. He looked up, and his eyes narrowed.

She gasped and pressed both her hands against her breast. For an instant she staggered; then the man, angry with her because of the necessity, took her roughly by the arm and made her sit in the chair he had vacated.

"Now we will have this thing out," he said.

She seemed unable to speak, but sat gasping up at him, her pale, swollen eyes begging for pity.

"How much longer are you to keep me standing here?"

"Don't look — like that," she panted. "You must not let yourself — be cruel. I could not stand it now. I've been through too much. I think if you speak cruelly I might die here at once — and then, oh, Connie, oh, my poor darling —"

The man clenched his teeth. There was something real in all this. He had never hated her as he did at that moment, but his instinct of self-preservation cautioned him to control his rage. He felt the cold touch of her forthcoming disclosure. Yes, no matter how disastrous to himself, he must be calm.

The fear of death and something more was on the shivering creature whom Martel called his wife. No matter how little he gave her or what ill-usage she had suffered from him, the wretched woman had laid her very life at his feet, still worshiped abjectly at his shrine. Yet it needed all of his carefully acquired composure, all the cunning of self-interest, to keep him standing there waiting until she chose to speak.

"Oh, I've done wrong not to tell you this before, Connie. You must try to forgive me. I loved you so

dearly; I could not risk anything that might lessen whatever claims I had upon you. I was not an old woman when you married me. I had every right to expect to live years and years, just giving myself and all I had to you. Ariadne said I had done wrong not to tell you, but she was only a child, and it didn't seem —"

"Never mind about Ariadne. This concerns ourselves alone," he said between his teeth.

"Oh, but it doesn't. That is just the terrible thing. Oh, Connie, it's this way. That will —"

"You mean your husband's will? The one you would never let me see?"

"Yes. I wish now I had told you everything. The money was mine. You know I've always been good to her. Look at the clothes she has."

The man writhed in his skin. How much longer could he endure this fatuous babble. "Curse Ariadne," he spat out. "Try, for God's sake, once in your life, to keep to the point — and to be truthful. You have never been straight with me. You have lied about your age, about the hold Skipwith's daughter has on you. That came out in a moment of fright only a few days ago. Now it seems I'm to be given still another pleasant surprise. Have it out! Don't sit there goggling up at me. God! What is coming? Say it — speak — I'm not going to touch you."

He turned his head and pressed a scented handkerchief against lips that he knew were trembling.

"Oh, that's right," he heard her whisper, "don't look at me while I tell you; then you'll see why you must help me to get well. I have no power over the money after death. It all goes to Mr. Skipwith's daughter."

She crouched back in the chair, covering her face. The



man stood perfectly still. He had not taken the handkerchief from his mouth. When finally he spoke, his voice was muffled against its folds.

"Yet you told me before I married you — and many times after — that the fortune was yours absolutely, that the girl had been disinherited and left your pensioner. When I asked you if no provision had been made in case of her marriage, you swore that no condition of any sort had been imposed upon you."

"That was the truth, Connie. I did not deceive you there. It was stated in the will that her marriage was to make no difference between us. The only thing I didn't dare to tell you was that I hadn't the power to leave it all to you, dear. You know that is what I would do. Perhaps, even as things are, if we appealed to Ariadne —"

The man checked her with a gesture. Now he took down the handkerchief. There was a crimson stain on the linen. He came closer, looking down with a face which held all the hate and evil of his nature. One corner of his mouth twitched in a desperate smile.

"You were wise not to tell me sooner," he said.

She sobbed on quietly. Now everything was told except one thing. She must still keep back the real reason of her visit to a specialist. When that was over — and the fear lifted — there should never be another shadow of deception. He had listened quite patiently for him. The full, malignant significance of his last remark passed over her unhappy head. She was thankful for the quiet of his tones.

He had turned again and was standing by a window, looking out. She lifted tear-swollen eyes to watch him. Against the crimson curtain his dark head and clear, olive skin glowed with the beauty of some great portrait,

one of those supernal treasures found here and there in long galleries of lesser paintings, that hold the secret of immortality — giving out warmth and tone and the very radium of life, making the frail, ephemeral, human things that pass before it seem like a drift of fallen leaves.

Forgetting herself in this adoration of the man who utterly obsessed and dominated her, she rose slowly and made her way to his side. The long folds of the curtain shook with his sudden clutch upon it. He thought his very flesh must scream as she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Then you will take me to London, Connie dear?"

"Yes, we will go to London."

"And you don't hate your poor little Donna?"

He threw back his head and could have laughed aloud. She nestled her faded, blond head against his shoulder.

Hate her — oh, no. She was now too well armed for hate; but if death could bring the money free and unhindered into his control — how the long, olive fingers now flattened waxen-yellow against the curtain would sink into that swollen throat; how they would tighten; oh, to tear, to torture, to kill this feeble vampire who had had the skill to trick him! One moment longer, with her perfumed head against him, and money or no money, he must kill her.

He wrenched himself away and turned to his own room.

"Oh, Connie!" came the feeble protest.

In answer she heard the key turn in his lock.

## CHAPTER IX

THAT same afternoon, when Cummins entered with the tea, she found Ariadne lying so utterly still that she thought the girl asleep. Setting the tray down noiselessly, the maid stood debating whether or not to speak.

"It's all right, Cummins. I shall drink it presently."

"Then you're not feeling worse, Miss Skipwith, as I feared when I saw you stretched there so dead-like."

"No," Ariadne replied. "I am getting strength all the time. I was only thinking hard."

"We've all got pleasant things to think of now," said Cummins, genially. "I'm fair 'eartened myself with this going to London so soon. I couldn't 'a' stood it much longer."

"Yes, we are going. I will try to do a little packing later."

"Don't you bother, Miss Ariadne. I can get you ready in no time at all. Mrs. Martel 'as a good start a'ready. They are drinking tea down there in her room together. She's likely 'aving it out with him about going. 'Im and 'is valet aren't carin' much for Hengland. So much the better for Hengland, is what I say!"

Ariadne could not discuss her family affairs with a servant. Yet she did not check the unwonted flow of eloquence. After a few more caustic observations Cummins departed.

The girl drank slowly. The health and perfect soundness of her young body had responded with marvelous rapidity to its recent hours of rest and nourishment. When she stood or walked, no sense of weakness was felt. Crossing the room to the small mirror, she pushed the heavy hair back from her forehead. A pair of deep brooding eyes met hers. The unsmiling mouth had, somehow, an older look. But the face was not that of an invalid.

"I never felt stronger in my life," was her thought. The garb of slippers and a loose wrapper seemed incongruous. She felt restless, almost irritated, in the hampering folds. "I can't pack with these kimono sleeves in the way," she told herself, "and I must have something to do. I can't lie there thinking."

Ringling for hot water, she deliberately set about making her toilette, at first rather cautiously, since the doctor had said she must wait until to-morrow. Possibly the weakness might return. After slipping a last pin in her hair, she sat down by the window looking out across the Tournooiveld.

She longed to be out there among the trees. The air of the little room was oppressive. If she could only see her lover for a moment. It seemed hard to have to wait for another day, when her heart and her strengthened body also twitched with impatient energy.

She rose and finished dressing, tying the sash that fell over her frock of delicate blue muslin. Now she felt entirely herself and moved about, opening trunks and laying out things ready for packing. With a skirt half-folded she paused and let her hands and the garment fall to her sides. Ought she to let Randolph know that they would leave to-morrow night? Way back in that dim black experience already far away, when

he had rescued her, there was something he had whispered about plans. He might be making arrangements for her, arrangements which, because of Donna's new and terrible urgency, could not be carried out. As she hesitated, a knock came to her door. She opened, to find one of the bell boys holding out a note.

"Mynheer wishes reply, Mademoiselle," he said.

It was from Randolph.

"MY OWN DARLING: The *portier* has just told me that your stepmother is leaving the Hague to-morrow. Dearest, I must see you! I will be very, very considerate, and shall keep you only a few moments; but come, unless it is a physical impossibility. I longed for you specially a little while ago, for I hunted up Big Jan, and when I had made him hold out those huge cheese-scoops of his, I heaped them both with ten-guilder pieces, all new and shining gold. I didn't quite have the nerve to hand out chink to the *portier* — God bless him! — so instead I put a tidy little sum to his credit in a leading bank here, and slipped him the receipt made out in his own name. At first he wouldn't take it, but I bullied him till he had to promise. Then he made me lean down, as I thought, to whisper thanks, — but, good Lord! — he *kissed* me! Wasn't that awful!

"Come to me, dearest darling. I am in private sitting-room 32, on the second floor, waiting. Yours until death,

"RANDY."

To this she replied hastily in writing: "I am well enough now and shall be down at once. A."

Ariadne ran to the mirror again. Her face was glowing. "Oh, I am glad I have lost that ghostly look."

She longed to fly to him, yet an intense shyness held her back. She stood in the center of the little room, trying to subdue the fluttering of her heart. Her eyes fell upon the pink-centered roses, and selecting two at random, she pinned them to her blue gown. Her fingers trembled and grew cold.

"I am weak yet," she told herself, "and I'm silly to feel so frightened at the thought of seeing him, when it is the thing I long for most," and then, in spite of knees which threatened to give way at any moment, she went slowly down the stairs.

The door of Number 32 was slightly ajar. She went up to it. Her feet on the thick hall carpets had made no sound. She knew that he was waiting. Her heart and soul reached out to him, yet she faltered, and it seemed a physical impossibility to take the next step.

She put her right hand out to push open the door, and with her left she clung to the frame. Randolph must have seen the clinging fingers, for he strode across the room, flung back the panel, and with a low cry of "Ariadne," drew her in to him, folding his arms about her.

For a long while they did not speak, only clung silently together. Then he lifted her face and kissed her. She let her head fall backward upon his arm. Her eyes were closed in the ecstasy of meeting.

"My love — my white rose — my Ariadne," he murmured between the kisses. "Don't shiver so, my darling. Everything is all right for us. Come over here to this big lounge, poor little invalid. We must talk a little, just a little. I won't keep you long this time."

Again upon the sofa there were kisses and long, silent, strained embraces. It seemed a hardship to both young

hearts that there should be a necessity for speech, even for thinking — when silence was so dear.

Randolph was the first to pull himself together. He drew back, only keeping the two cold hands in his.

"Now, see here, darling, we've got to talk. The *portier* says those unspeakable creatures, those Martels — are off to a place in Germany. I forget the name, but that doesn't matter. Of course you are not to go."

"They have changed," she managed to say; "they won't go to Germany."

"Germany, China, or Patagonia — it's all the same to me; the farther off the better. Have they decided on a train?"

"To-morrow night, I think."

"I'm sorry it isn't earlier."

The girl said nothing.

"Now listen, precious one, I've been doing some cabling and letter-writing of my own. Do you think that by to-morrow you will be strong enough to make the crossing to England by yourself?"

"You — you want me to go to England?"

"Yes, dear, though I dread you to have to take the journey without me, I can put you in the boat at Flushing, and you will be met in London by a Mrs. Austin — in fact she's Lady Austin — and is a connection of your own. She was Lydia Fairfax of Wynne Hall near Culpeper and is an intimate friend of your cousin, Judge Henry. I got in touch with her by wire. That is not all. I have sent a cable to your cousin Judge, urging him to sail immediately. Well, I won't tell you exactly what I said, but I feel sure he will take the next fast steamer."

"Will he come to London, too?"

"Straight as the Plymouth express can bring him, I believe."

"Oh, Randolph, you are doing all this just for me."

He laughed and caught her to him. "Yes, my precious, just for you. Strange, isn't it, that a fellow should go to such awful trouble — just for the girl he worships? Now how soon can you have your things packed?"

Instead of answering she clung to him. For the first time it was she who sought his kisses. She could not, it would seem, have enough of love. If he tried to speak, her lips pressed back the words, so closely did her mouth cling to his. There was so intense, so desperate a yielding, that the young man's head reeled with it. Finally he tore himself away.

"You — you madden me, Ariadne," he said unsteadily. "Oh, my love, my adorable love, in a few days more we can be together always. We won't need then to think or plan. When can you be ready to start for Flushing?"

There was no use trying to escape it any longer. Ariadne huddled herself together. The exquisite, shifting color went from her face.

"Sit down, Randy," she whispered, "I will talk now. Something has happened; I must tell you —"

He sat by her again, wondering at the utter change that had taken place.

"I can't follow your plans — not yet, anyway. I am going to London, but not your way. Don't let Cousin Nellie's friend try to meet me. I must go with my stepmother."

The young man frowned. "You prefer to go with her after — after — well, we needn't think of that."

"It isn't that I prefer it. If I could have my own way, I would never again on earth do anything but



what pleased you. But just now, for a little while longer, I must stay with Madonna."

Randolph still looked annoyed. "Oh, well, I suppose her being alone can make no material difference. Of course that brute, Martel, isn't going?"

Ariadne's head drooped. "Yes, he is going, too."

Randolph leaned back, his eyes fixed on her. All the boyish happiness went out of his face.

"You mean he is going with you to London?"

"Yes."

"And his French chauffeur-valet?"

"I suppose so."

"In fact, the entire happy family. Just as it was before I met you here."

"I can't help myself, Randy."

The man got to his feet. "Well, I can help myself," he said, "and I can help you, too. I won't stand it."

She made no reply, but sat with clasped hands and down-dropped eyes. Her lips, now utterly bloodless, were pressed together.

Randolph's heart smote him. He went to her, lifting her unresponsive hands.

"Dear little girl, forgive me for speaking so roughly. I forgot, just for the moment, that you had been ill. Only you must see for yourself that I cannot let you pass another night under the same roof as that fiend, much less allow you to travel with him. Things have changed. Now you belong to me. I've the right to look after you. Just as soon as Judge Henry gets here, we are going to have a quiet little wedding. Don't you see for yourself, dear, that I couldn't possibly let the woman I'm to marry continue to be near such a man?"

"I know how you feel about it, Randolph. It's a

million times more terrible to me. But I can't leave Donna."

"Is it a choice then between me and your step-mother?"

She caught his hand. "Don't say such a thing. There's nobody in the world but you; oh, don't you see how I love you?"

"You say that, and yet in the same breath persist in a thing that no decent man would tolerate."

"I must bear it a little longer; oh, if I could make you understand!"

"I fear you cannot, Ariadne. The point at issue is very clear. The girl that I am to marry can't remain in close association with a man who has offered her the grossest insult a woman can receive! Except for the menace to your good name, I should have shot him, and there's not a jury on earth but would have cleared me. You are no child. You realize clearly the peril you were in. God! When I think of it!" He threw back his head and ran his fingers through his thick hair. "But I must keep that vision away, or I'll do murder yet. Ariadne — Ariadne — don't you see what it means to me that you should have been — for those hours — at his mercy?"

She gave a little moaning sound of assent.

"You would have a right to despise me if I consented to your stopping on with him."

"I need never speak to him or look at him."

"What difference does that make? He will be there. He can look at you, when every glance is contamination. He can sit by you — even touch you — God in heaven! That's what I will not stand!" He rose to his feet again and walked rapidly back and forth, fighting for self-control.

The girl on the sofa did not move. Randolph strode to the window, staring down into the street. Mechanically he put his hand to an inner pocket. He drew out a still folded paper that had a legal look. He seemed unconscious that he held or looked at it. Then the typewritten words across the folded top grew into a meaning: "Patredis versus Patredis" —

He opened the foolscap, glancing down the page. Again he stared from the window, his brows drawn together in thought. Then, folding the paper deliberately and holding it in his hand, he went back to Ariadne.

"Listen, dear, I have something else to say to you. It is ugly and rather terrible. Do you feel strong enough to bear it?"

"Yes," she whispered and almost smiled, for what could be so terrible as the things he had already said to her?

"I'm sorry that I have to bring this out so soon. I proposed to wait. But this present issue forces it."

"Yes," she said again.

"Now, don't be frightened. Here, come a little closer."

She crept up to him with a sigh of thankfulness. He kissed her hair, and went on: "Do you remember that morning at the little restaurant when we were having chocolate together, I gave you, as an example of the kind of legal work I wouldn't touch, the case of a man who was then being blackmailed through our office?"

"Yes, I remember well."

"And that same morning you told me Martel was in desperate straits and making your stepmother miserable about twenty thousand dollars he needed?"

"Yes."

"Certain things you said then aroused my suspicions.

I cabled that night to our New York office — and have had their answer."

She lifted her beautiful, saddened eyes to his face. He hesitated. "Perhaps you'd better not look at me just that way, dear, or I shan't have the courage to go on."

The pink flush came again as she buried her face against his shoulder.

"To come to the point at once, my suspicions were right: the man Patredis is Martel."

The girl drew herself upright. She could not comprehend at once all that his statement involved. Divorce, alimony, and blackmail were things that had not touched her life.

"Had Mr. Martel been married before?" she asked.

"Very much so," Randolph replied. "He was divorced from this woman, or she from him, only a few months before he met your stepmother. The divorce was one of those loose, trumped-up affairs they permit to go through the courts in some of our Western States. Afterwards, when Patredis' wife heard he had married a rich widow, she began looking about for a flaw in the process. This was comparatively easy to find. She traced him to Europe under the new name of Martel."

"It is not even his own name?" gasped Ariadne with such horror that Randolph smiled tenderly.

"You dear innocent! If he were the only scamp wandering about Europe with a false label! But that amounts to nothing. The really dreadful part is that your stepmother was never legally married to him."

The girl fell back, dazed and staring. Randolph involuntarily looked away.

"It makes me sick to have these loathsome things dragged before you, Ariadne. But Fate has mixed you

up in some queer snarls. Only let me get you out for once and all."

But Ariadne was beating her hands together. "You must not tell Donna; oh, don't tell Donna."

"That is the worst of all, isn't it?" he said compassionately. "Lord, I shall hate it! But I must; my facts are here in this paper. The poor soul cannot doubt it."

"You must not tell her, I say," repeated the girl wildly.

"But, dear heart, it is the best way of shaking off Martel. It is the only way."

"Why not go to him then?" demanded Ariadne.

"Because he would deny it and challenge me for proofs. He would be sure to make a feint of going to law against me, knowing that the full evidence could not reach me for some time, and I will not risk you near him till the papers come."

"But that paper in your hand?"

"This is only a copy of a part, not by any means the full evidence."

"But you think it enough to convince Donna."

"More than enough."

"Randolph, you can't tell her. She is not well."

"Nonsense, Ariadne. I saw her in the hallway as I came in. She was chattering away to the manager, and I thought her unusually animated. Fortunately, she did not catch sight of me."

"That was only excitement at the thought of leaving. I tell you she is ill. The doctor was here this morning. Oh, can it be only this morning! Already it seems as if I must have known it for a year!"

"Known it? What are you talking about?"

Ariadne caught herself together. "Nothing, only that

she is not well." Then she turned to him, lifting his hand in both of hers.

"It's so dreadful. It's all so dreadful. But, Randy, won't you trust me in just this one thing? Don't let Donna know it yet. Wait until we get to London."

"And have you cross the Channel and go to a London hotel with that man?"

"I must — I must," she moaned.

He took away his hand. "I must confess that I don't know what to think of you, Ariadne. After what passed at the Black Village —"

"Don't — don't bring that back; I couldn't endure it," she cried sharply.

"I must bring it back, if it clears your reason. As for that miserable woman, she deserves what she is getting."

"You don't know, or you couldn't be so cruel."

"Cruel!" he echoed! "And what is your treatment of me?"

"You will not understand — some day — oh, my dear lover, can't you trust me just a little while?" She flung her arms about him, but he sat unresponsive as a statue of bronze. She fell back, shuddering.

"I can't lose him; I can't lose him," her tortured heart was crying. "Let everything else go — but keep the happiness of his love."

"I had better go, Ariadne," he said, rising. "I'm sure that it is your weakness and the suddenness with which I have had to present this that makes you unable to see reason. You can't start now until to-morrow night. Let me see you again in the morning. By that time you will have thought things out."

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, "that will be better."

He walked toward the door, but she sprang after him. "Don't leave me like this, Randy." He turned, his

face still dark and set ; but as she came nearer, he opened his arms.

When at last he went, he said in parting : "Try to forget the rough things that I said, precious. Remember only that I love you — that soon you are to be my own dear wife — and that I would fight the devil for you with his own pitchfork — and spit him on it, too."

"Dear, dearest love," she whispered, "and I want you to remember that the only happiness I have had in my whole life is what you have brought me."

"Dear little girl, I hate to say good-by — even for a few hours. Go back to your room now and try to get a long night's sleep. We'll meet to-morrow by the Vyver."

"Yes, by the Vyver, where we first really met."

He kissed her again and went. As she climbed the steep stairs to her room, each heavy tread seemed to fall as lead upon the girl's breaking heart.

Ariadne's dinner was served up-stairs, and later in the evening Mrs. Martel came up to her. She knew nothing of Randolph's visit, and Ariadne did not speak of it. Even had she wished to do so, the time would have been unpropitious, for Donna was overflowing with her own affairs.

"I have told Connie about the will at last," she said triumphantly. "Oh, he was so noble ; of course it shocked him a little, but he controlled himself at once. We have just eaten dinner together — and Connie had violets on the table. These are some of them."

She smiled and looked down upon a cluster of fragrant, purple flowers pinned to her spangled evening dress. "He is perfectly reconciled to going to London. Oh, Ariadne, I do believe he is getting into one of his very nicest spells. It makes me so happy. But you are

looking very pale again. You must go straight to bed, my dear. It will be a very busy day for all of us tomorrow. Now I'll run down-stairs again, for I need my beauty sleep, too."

"One moment, Madonna, did you tell him — anything of what the doctor said?"

"Oh, dear, no. I didn't need to. I just said it was a weak heart. It may be only that. Somehow I seem to feel sure that little Doctor Bergen was mistaken."

"You still mean to keep me to that promise of silence?"

"Of course. Now, more than ever. But who on earth would you want to tell?"

Ariadne said nothing. A brief struggle was in her mind. Should she tell Donna everything, throw herself on the older woman's mercy, and ask to be released? There might be just a possibility.

Mrs. Martel went on, sustaining the note of shrill inquiry. "You don't even know anybody here, unless that wretched Randolph Carr is still hanging around. I should think he'd have the grace to leave us after being the cause of your accident."

Ariadne stared in pure amazement. "He, the cause! Why, Donna, he was the one who saved me; he brought me back."

"You know very well that it was because Connie thought he ought to warn you against Mr. Carr that he planned to have you alone."

"Oh!" said Ariadne. There was nothing else she could say.

"I never saw any one so cut up over a thing as Connie was over that accident. He couldn't seem to get it off his poor, dear mind. Oh, Ariadne, Connie was simply lovely to me at dinner." She smiled down coquet-



tishly, touching her violets. "And you know how fascinating he can be. Never mind, dear, some day just the right man — the sort of man that Connie and I can approve — will come along. Then you will know what it means to a woman to yield up her whole nature to the man of her choice. Love is the best thing in the world, as Byron said." Tossing her head, she went out of the door, archly smiling, all glittering spangles and violet perfume.

In the hall she turned back. "No, it wasn't Byron, it was Browning. But both their names begin with a 'B.'"

As she disappeared, Ariadne sank down into the chair. It was enough that tragedy should threaten without the glare of sardonic humor playing over it.

"What will the end be?" she thought wearily. If Randolph persisted in his demand that she should leave the Martels, if she were still bound by her pledge to Donna, it might be even separation — a breach that could never be healed.

"Oh, he couldn't give me up, he couldn't give me up. He knows how I love him. To-morrow, when he has had time to think things over, he will trust me. He will not let me go out of his life, even though for a little while I must seem to oppose his wishes."

She rocked herself to and fro. Poor Donna, who had said that some day her stepdaughter, too, might know the glory of self-surrender. It seemed strange to her, almost repellent, that a broken, aging woman could still place herself among those who love. Surely that was for the young, for those whose eyes were clear, whose hearts could leap and tremble at a spoken name. Yet if love meant sacrifice, idolatry, and blindness to all evil in the creature adored, the woman had given and was

still giving the very essence of her being to her sinister god. And for what reward? Brutal indifference and ill-concealed scorn! But Donna would not see. Even now, in her rejoicing at his kindness, she could overlook the fact, so obvious to Ariadne, that the man feared to lose not his benefactress, but her unstinted bounty.

Ariadne dared not ask herself what stand the infatuated woman would take if she were told of Martel's first marriage and the situation that now devolved. If the man commanded her to remain with him, defying both law and convention, the woman would indubitably obey.

"I must not think of these things any longer," reflected the girl; "I must sleep. To-morrow Randolph and I can talk it over quietly. As long as I have him and he loves me, nothing else matters."

Randolph was waiting for her under the chestnut trees. She could see him pacing slowly back and forth, his head bent forward. He wore the tan tweed hat and the loosely fitting coat that swung in such gallant folds from his lean, broad shoulders.

While dressing, that morning, Ariadne had carefully selected the same gray costume she had worn at their first meeting by the Vyver. Such trifles are significant to young lovers. She knew that he would recognize the meaning of her choice.

As the young man caught sight of her, he flung his cigarette in the water, much to the disgust of the greedy ducks, lifted his hat, and smiled. It was not the boyish greeting that she loved. Like the ducks, she felt just a little defrauded. His first words were commonplace.

"I hope you had a good night, dear."

"Yes, after I once got to sleep."

He saw the letter in her hand. "Another from Grandma?" he asked.

"No. It seems strange to be my own postman, but," she flushed and smiled, "it's a long, long one to you — written in installments while you were away. You remember you asked me to write and then save it till you returned?"

"I should say so. It was good of you to bring it." He held out his hand, but in giving it, she entreated: "Don't read it now, please. Wait until I go. It's — it's — my first love-letter. I would be terribly embarrassed."

"Your will is law," he answered gallantly, and before placing it in his pocket, he kissed the superscription. After this a silence which both felt to be a little awkward fell upon them.

"No sunshine to-day," observed Randolph, looking up through the trees at a gray sky overhead.

"I'm afraid not," sighed Ariadne. "Doesn't the old stork look miserable on that one long leg of his among the yellow flag lilies?"

Randolph surveyed him. "How silly to be stuck up on top of one leg like that — especially such a thin, uncertain sort of a support."

"My little Vermeer milkmaid over there in the Mauritshaus will be shining in this dull light like a jewel in an open case. I must see her once more before I leave the Hague, but I suppose the Mauritshaus would scarcely be open so early."

Both were talking for time, and each knew it. There was a latent fear of touching upon personal realities. Ariadne unwittingly had sounded the first note when she spoke of leaving.

They stood exactly on the spot where only a few days earlier Randolph had found her. In the brief interval all the waves of life seemed to have broken against them

and were still surging tempestuously. Their one hold in the stormy sea was love. To this the girl clung desperately. If Randy struck down her hands from that dear refuge, it made no difference afterward where the black tide bore her.

"Let us sit down," he said abruptly; "we must talk about it. There is no use shirking."

They walked across to the same bench where the two had sat gossiping so gayly that first morning. Randolph, taking off his hat, threw it on to the seat beside him. He ran his brown fingers through browner hair. Ariadne looked up, taking in consciously all the charm and dark beauty of his face. She loved the bold, fine line from ear to chin and the mouth which might have been stern but for those deep nicks at the corner — where a boyish joy of life seemed caught. Above all things she loved that sudden smile, and the way his brow flashed white against the bronze tints of his face. There was no smile now. He was staring out across the clear stretch of water, his brows drawn heavily.

"I've had my cable from Judge Henry," he said.

"Oh, is he coming?"

"Yes, almost at once, I believe."

"Will he go to London first?"

"Yes. His official address will be Brown, Shipley, and Company. Here, let me write it down for you. I don't know yet the name of his London Hotel."

He wrote on a card of his own, and Ariadne slipped it into her glove.

"Of course, if you are to do as I wish — as I hope you will, Ariadne — you won't need to bother about their address or anything else. Probably we'll run down together to meet their steamer."

"Oh, if we only could," said the girl. "It makes me

shiver with delight just to think of seeing one of my own people again. And I love Judge Henry; he was father's very best friend."

"He is yours, too, Ariadne. They all love you — and will thank me for forcing you to leave these people."

She said nothing. Her eyes went down to the gray-gloved hands clasped in her lap.

"Have you decided to go to-night, as I wish, Ariadne?"

"They — Madonna — have engaged passage from the Hook."

"That goes to Harwich," said the man. "Then I had better take you down to Flushing. It is only four hours from here. We can start by the three-thirty train."

She made no reply. He looked at her. He had hoped against further opposition, but since it was to be met, he was telling himself there must be no vehemence, no excitement. They could not have a scene beside the Vyver. To the people who passed and glanced at them, they appeared a couple of unusually well-favored young foreigners — lovers it might be — who had come out for a morning walk and were now resting.

"Must we have that whole discussion over again, dearest?" he asked rather sadly.

"No, Randolph. There is nothing to discuss. I have thought over everything. I can see how it looks to you, but for this once you must trust me. You must believe me when I tell you that, much as I long to be with you, to follow you from this minute and never think of those others in my life again, to-night I must go with Donna."

"And you refuse to give me any further explanation?"

"I can't, Randolph. I'm not at liberty to do it. But I think I can say this much without breaking my word.

My stepmother is going to London to consult a specialist."

"That's nothing. Those lazy, over-fed women are always seeing specialists."

"I have promised to stay with her until she sees her doctor."

Again Randolph ran the long fingers through his hair. His next question was something of a surprise. "What did Martel say to her about the other night?"

"That he took me off alone, as I would then have to listen to him while he warned me against you."

"Does she know that the chauffeur was his valet?"

"She doesn't dream it. No one knows except the old *portier* and ourselves."

"Of course she believes everything the brute tells her."

"Absolutely. She has no will, no mind of her own, where he is concerned. In all these years I have never seen her get her own way but once, and it is this time about the trip to London."

"She has worked the specialist dodge on him, too?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear her, or did she only tell you?"

"She told me."

"Ariadne, I don't believe a word of it. It's merely a trumped-up scheme to steal you away from me. They may cross the Channel, but they will never get to London. You will be carried off to Norway, to Iceland, or some other spot where I cannot find you. Can't you see that they are afraid I shall persuade you to marry me, which means that your stepmother will lose the money?"

"It is true about this going to London, Randolph. You must believe me this time. It is true."

"Even so, that doesn't particularly interest me," he

said. "The one point that I hold to, and that I must hold to, Ariadne, is that I shall not allow the woman I love to remain near the devil incarnate who menaced her. Why, good God, child, that beast himself, low as he is, would have a right to despise me if I allowed it. Last night was a torture to me merely to know that you were in the same house with him. I won't stand it again — and you might as well realize it. Either you come to Flushing with me by the three-thirty train, or —"

She put out her hand quickly. "Don't say it, dear; don't force a thing which may make us lose each other."

"Oh, my darling," he groaned, "you are leaving me no other choice. I love you; you can't doubt that. There will never be another girl on earth for me, if you throw me over now. But there are some things that I cannot do, even for you, and this is one of them."

"Then if I go to-night with Madonna, you will never care to see me again?"

"I'll care — yes, I'll care to. Good God, my days and nights will be one long agony to see you, but —"

He paused. She was staring out across the water, her face a white lantern in which the light had died.

"Go on — I'd rather hear it all."

"The woman I want for my wife must not let anything — any promise, any exaggerated sense of duty — weigh against the horror of remaining in such a man's presence. She must go — not only because her lover asks it — but because all that he thought fine, and sweet, and worthy in her, would demand it. As you said once about marrying a man who would be willing to join such a ménage as yours: you would despise him because he could so lower himself, even for the sake of gaining you. My feeling in this case is exactly the same. Oh, Ariadne, it

kills me to be saying such a thing to you, but it is the deepest part of me that speaks. I couldn't marry a woman who is willing to stay near the monster who so nearly destroyed her."

Ariadne gave a little sigh. The clasped hands were again on her lap. When at last she spoke, her voice was low and unshaken.

"Yes, now I see it all. It wasn't clear before. You are right, dear. You could not marry such a woman."

"Then it is to be good-by?"

"I can't see any other way."

The old stork slowly unfolded the angles of the other leg, shook away the stiffness, and began a stately progress through the yellow iris. A half-tamed sparrow perched at the back of the bench and twittered in hope of benefice. The two human things neither saw nor heard. They sat in a close-drawn tent, ignorant of an outer world.

Ariadne scarcely knew the moment when her companion left her. She sat on alone.

Finally she rose and went close to the water.

"Good-by, dear Vyver," she whispered. "Good-by — dear little wide-eyed girl over there at the Maurits-haus, and good-by — good-by forever to my one, one happiness."

Then she turned and went back to the hotel.



## BOOK THREE

### CHAPTER I

THE fashionable West End of London is not early to rise, a fact to be regretted, at least on a clear June morning. The sun had long since spurned the forest of crooked chimney-pots across the Thames, and now lifted its golden bowl to pour its glory into pleasanter channels — to flood the courtyards and green, open spaces of the rich, and brim with an ærial tide of light the broad, magnificent thoroughfare of Piccadilly.

It was not quite ten o'clock. Many of the shops still showed their green shutters. Doorsteps were being hearthstoned and brass signs polished. In fact, Piccadilly was at its morning toilet, an indelicacy which would have counted for little, had all pedestrians been as unobservant as a certain small, foreign-looking person who was walking toward Mayfair, carrying in his hand several unopened letters. He shuffled these as a poker player does cards — going back always with deepest interest to one in a square blue envelope, directed in a bold, ignorant, yet very feminine hand. This he turned over many times, holding it up to the light, and examining with minute care the red penny stamp and the London postmark of two days before.

Suddenly he pulled himself together with a jerk and looked around. He was directly in front of the hotel. He slipped the blue letter into an inner pocket, and with the others in his hand, went in, pushed the lift button, and hurried to his employer's room. Mr. Martel was

still in bed. François gave him the other letters, and then went over to a window and drew the shade.

"Another fine morning, sir," he remarked.

His master did not answer. He was sorting the post.

"Here are two letters for Mrs. Martel; you'd better take them to her."

François took them but remained near the bed. His hand went to an inner pocket.

"There's another, sir. I put it in here in case Mrs. Martel might be with you. I'm afraid you won't like this one."

Martel sprang to a sitting posture. "Has that woman traced me here already?"

"It looks so, sir. It's a London postmark."

Martel snatched at the letter, tearing it open. The servant's eyes never left his face.

The man sank back with a groan. "Good God!" he muttered.

François' sallow face took on an expression of anxiety. "Anything I can do, sir?"

"Take these letters to Mrs. Martel. Find out if she's up yet. Then come back."

As François vanished, Martel read more carefully:

"I've got your number again. When are you coming across with the wad? I need it and I'm going to have it. To-morrow, when you get this, send me word to the above address, and do it quick. You needn't try to dodge me no more. I've got the lead on you, and I want that money.

"If you haven't got the sense to know when you're beaten I'll be dropping in at your hotel, just to give you a few lessons.

"Your loving wife,

"BLANCHE PATREDIS."

François was swift, but even before his return, his master was on his feet.

"Here," he said, "throw out my things on the bed — and then take this letter. Hire a taxi and go to this address. Tell that she-devil the money is coming. Make her believe it, for it's true. She mustn't come to this hotel. Good God! She's up to it. No, I won't stop for a bath. I had better dress and go downstairs. I'll wait in the main lounge till you get back. Tell her that if she makes a row now, everything will go to pieces. Say that I'll come to her in person, later on."

"I understand, sir."

When the man had gone, Constantine Martel dressed with feverish haste. There was no other guest in the lounge. He walked up and down, smoking. The pause of every taxicab outside brought apprehension. Between his teeth he cursed this woman who now menaced him. Here was no feeble, adoring creature ready to give up her very existence to his pleasure, but a bold and predatory foe, unscrupulous, and far more powerful than himself.

He wondered whether she had changed much in the seven years since their parting. She was well over thirty by this time, and with the sort of life she must have led would probably have grown coarse as well as prematurely old.

He glanced at the clock. François could not return for a full half-hour yet, even if he had been able to see her at once. Scowling, he threw himself into a chair near the entrance and rang for coffee. As he drank it, feeling the resultant stimulus, his clearer vision brought only added apprehension. Her letter had been written two days before. Blanche had given him one full day to reply, but unless she had fundamentally changed, her

impatience would not extend many hours longer. It had been a trick of the evil one which had prevented his sending to Brown, Shipley the day before. She would surely come to the hotel. There was the one chance that François might reach her lodgings before she had left them.

The tall, superb figure of a woman filled the doorway. He did not feel any special excitement. Somehow he had known, all along, that she would come.

Martel rose, with no great haste, and went toward her.

"Mrs. Patredis," he said in a conventional tone. He had not seen her face yet because of the light behind her, but he did not need to see it.

"Exactly — Mrs. Patredis," she replied as casually. "You must have known what would happen when you didn't answer."

"I only received your letter a few moments ago — and have already sent my valet to your lodgings."

"My, but ain't we swell," she remarked, with a low laugh. "It pays to marry a rickety old Jane with money, don't it?"

Martel threw a nervous glance around.

"Please be careful. There's a small sitting-room on the next floor where we can talk quietly. Kindly come with me."

"I trust I ain't being led into your wife's boudoir," said the woman flippantly.

He walked toward a curving stairway, she a little in the rear. At the foot he paused, motioning her to go first. As she put her high-heeled slipper on the first step, she turned a little, looking toward him with such open amusement, such good-natured contempt, that he felt the dark blood rush to his cheeks.

"Handsome than ever, and dolled up to beat the band," she remarked as if to herself, as she mounted the velvet-covered staircase.

He threw open the door of a sitting-room, and when she had entered, after an instant of hesitation, closed the door behind him.

Mrs. Patredis advanced with slow self-possession. She looked around the room, found a mirror above the broad mantelshelf and went up to it, lifted her veil, and laid it along the wide brim of her hat. Each motion was instinct, with a sort of slow, deliberate grace. She smiled at her own image.

"I don't think I've changed much either," she said complacently. "I've found that good looks pay."

The man kept his eyes from her. The surge of fury that had swept over him as he read her letter was battling now, in her presence, against a stronger passion of fear. She was so overwhelmingly at ease, so certain of control, not only over herself but over him, that the words he longed to say failed him. Had the power been his, he would have delighted in a gradual approach to the issue, in softly spoken insults and unexpected, rapier thrusts of speech. The woman's methods were of another sort.

"Now, look here, Mr. Patredis," she began in a businesslike voice, "I'm sick and tired of all your lies and hiding. I've got you where the wool's short, and you know it. When is the rest of that money to be paid?"

"You've had seven thousand within three weeks," he said fiercely, turning to her. "Why must you have the rest in such a hurry?"

"That's my business. I want it. Getting it is yours."

"I told you that I had scraped together every bit of cash I could. You know I've nothing of my own. I have to get it from — from —"

She gave a comprehending gesture. "Oh, I know where you get it from, all right. But the old girl is as rich as the inside of a dog."

"She has no control over her capital. We live on the income, and since the drain of your damned black-mailing began, we are often hard put to it. Curse you!" he cried, the accession of anger giving him a momentary courage. "That was a low deal to tamper with a divorce that you wanted as much as I — and then start a pack of lawyers hounding an innocent woman through me. I wouldn't have believed it of you, Blanche."

As he spoke, the woman's face had changed. She bent forward in her chair a little, her dark brows coming together in a frown.

"Yes, it has been pretty low down; I ain't proud of the deed, my boy. But just at the time I was put to it, as you say, on my own hook. Canning —" she paused.

"So he didn't marry you, after all?"

"No, he didn't," she flashed out fiercely, "and I don't want any of those sarcastic remarks of yours about it. I hate the sniveling cur, and I'm going to get even with him yet. That's part of my scheme, and it's one of the big reasons I want this money from you in a chunk."

"I'm doing what I can, Blanche. You'll have to be patient for a few days yet."

Martel seated himself in a chair opposite. The anger had already died. He watched her face almost timidly. She was evidently thinking hard.

"Your lawyers gave me that same song and dance about the income," she said, after a pause. "Why on

earth didn't you have the old woman make a settlement on you before you married her?"

"I did try it, but her affairs were in the hands of a trustee. I thought I could do anything with her afterward."

"It's a queer thing about you crooks," said the other musingly. "There's nothing you'd stop at. You have a million suspicions about things that don't matter, and you always are blind as bats about some one big fact that props up all the rest. It was that way with our divorce. I knew at the time there was a hole in it big enough for a camel to jump through. But you were so mad to get your hands on your share of the ranch-money that you couldn't see anything else. Now, even with a rickety old Jane like this, you're in the same sort of mess. You need somebody to look after you, Pat."

"Oh, don't call me Pat. I can't stand it," he broke out.

She smiled. "So Jane calls you Connie. I'm wise. Does the old girl know anything about this?"

"Good Lord! No. She thinks I need the money because of unfortunate speculations."

"That's as good a name as any. But the hour for Madame to know a few real facts is about to strike."

"You can't do it, Blanche. If you sprung a thing like this on her, it would be the end of everything for us both. You don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"No, but I'd like to argue a few with the goose, so that she'd lay an egg or two in my back-yard," laughed the woman.

"I'll swear you shall have the money, Blanche. It wouldn't hurt you, for old time's sake, to come down in your price a little. Maybe I can help you get back

at Canning. I'd like to. But I'll pay you every dollar, if you'll just give me time."

The woman regarded him intently. There was no antagonism in her face. When she next spoke, it was almost as to a fellow worker.

"But might it not be the best thing all around to let me see Mrs. Martel" — she smiled over the name — "and make her get a move on the egg factory?"

"It is the last thing to do. We are in London now so that she can see a heart specialist. I assure you that such a scene might be her death."

The woman's eyes narrowed. "Well, and what of it? Don't you get the dough?"

At this the man groaned and covered his face with his hands.

"No, this is another trick the devil has played me. I only found out a week ago that on her death every penny goes to the girl."

Mrs. Patredis sat upright, staring at him, her eyes as round as a startled child's.

"What? That Skipwith girl who trails around after you?"

He nodded. His whole bent figure expressed humiliation and despair.

"Well, of all damn fools —" began the woman, and then broke off for want of words.

Martel sprang to his feet and began pacing the small room. "Now you see just the trap I'm in. For seven years I've been the laughing stock of hotel clerks and the butt of other women that we picked up from time to time. The relatives and trustees of her first husband abhor me and begrudge every cent they pay over. She's had to keep the stepdaughter with us. I've stood it all, thinking that it could not last forever — and now



in one crash, not only are you hounding me, but I find I have to play the lap-dog and young lover in one, to keep the woman alive. Even you, Blanche, might pity a man in such a hole. I feel as if I were in that San Francisco earthquake again — pinned down under rafters, and that you were there setting fire to them."

"I wouldn't say much about that earthquake if I was you," remarked the other meaningly. "But never mind, old boy, I don't want to stick it to you any worse than I have to. I'm trying to think out something. Stop that cake-walk and sit still. You get on my nerves."

Martel took the chair obediently, his miserable eyes on her face.

"Look here," she said at length, looking at him squarely, "how old is the girl?"

"Somewhere about twenty-two or twenty-three."

"Is she a looker?"

"Some might think so. She's too slim and — er — bloodless for my taste."

"I never knew the shape to make any difference if you wanted something," she said bluntly. Her eyes were still narrowed.

With a fierce exclamation the man struck the chair-arm with his fist, then sprang upright. "Leave her out," he cried. "There's absolutely nothing to be gained by discussing her. She hates the sight of me."

Mrs. Patredis sat back in her chair. Her entire expression changed. The look of amusement and good-natured contempt returned. "And him so pretty and smells so sweet," she murmured.

He came up to her, holding out his hands. "Blanche, please go now. That's a good girl. I'm not going to try to give you the slip again, I swear it —"

"Cut out the swear," she interrupted, with a little gesture. "I always know when you are lying."

"I may be summoned to my wife's room at any moment. She has already written to New York for the money, and an answer may be here to-day. I'll call on you at your own lodgings as often as you wish. In fact I'd like it; there's something real about you, Blanche."

She, too, was on her feet. "Oh, I'm real enough," she laughed. "A little more of me, that's all. Come to me to-morrow about this time."

"You're a splendid looking woman, and you know it," said the man ingratiatingly.

She had gone to the mirror, and both shapely arms were raised to readjust the veil. At Martel's words, she turned a little, put out her left hand, and drew him closer. The two dark, glowing faces were nearly on a level. She threw him an indescribable look. "Not a bad-looking couple yet," she murmured, dropping her veil.

Then, without further words, she left the room.

Ariadne had dressed rather early, and after breakfasting, had knocked softly on Mrs. Martel's door.

The stepmother was up, seated before her dressing-table, while Cummins waved the faded hair back to its usual elaborate arrangement. "Come in," she said brightly.

As the girl entered, Donna smiled at her in the mirror. "Oh, I thought it might be Connie. Aren't you surprised to see me so smart, Ariadne? I'm feeling so much better, and it's such a heavenly morning, that I thought it would be nice to take a drive before luncheon. I haven't asked Connie yet. Cummins went to his door, but he had already gone out. It seems to me that old London is cheering us all up."

Ariadne crossed to the window. "It's a lovely day," she remarked.

"That's all right, Cummins," said Mrs. Martel. "Go and get your breakfast now. I want to have a little talk with Miss Skipwith before Mr. Martel comes in. I declare, Ariadne," she began, even before Cummins was out of the door, "I'm so much more myself, so much lighter in mind and body, too, that I don't believe there's going to be any need of a specialist. Look here," she rose, pressing her side, and turning her body freely. "Cummins had to pin over my dress last night, it has grown so large for me."

"You do look ever so much better," the girl replied. "Maybe Doctor Bergen was mistaken, after all."

"There's not a doubt of it. Why, I feel ten years younger, and I believe I look it too." She simpered at herself in the glass. "Of course it's chiefly Connie's doing. He is so adorable, so thoughtful. There's not a moment that he isn't thinking of ways to make me happy. Why, the other day, in Old Bond Street, we were looking in one of those Oriental jewelry windows, and I happened to say that I liked a silver pendant set with lapis lazuli. He took me by the arm and made me go into the shop that minute. The chain was a little too long, so he ordered it to be shortened. I shouldn't be surprised if he had gone there now to get it."

Ariadne found nothing to say.

"I believe I'd be perfectly happy, with nothing on earth left to wish for, if only that old Judge Henry would let me have the money Connie needs," added Mrs. Martel.

"I didn't tell you before, Donna, I've seen so little of you since we reached England — but Judge Henry is

coming over in person and may arrive almost any day."

Mrs. Martel's hands fell to her sides. She stared at her stepdaughter, and a querulous look fled across her face. "Why on earth haven't you told me this sooner?" she began, and then, with another sudden change, the radiance returned.

"Never mind, I won't scold. It's such good news. Of course he's coming in answer to my letter. It was a very strong, direct letter. By the way, Ariadne, what has become of Randolph Carr?"

"I do not know," said the girl in a constrained voice.

"I knew you would soon find out how little there was in that man," commented her stepmother. "Connie is a wonderful judge of character, and he took an intense dislike to him from the first."

Ariadne leaned wearily against the window-frame. A little flower-cart was being pushed along the street below. There were nodding lilacs, roses in many shades, round clusters of ragged robin bluer than any sky, and in one corner, thrust into a pendant water vessel, a few spikes of yellow iris. The girl's gaze fastened on these. The peddler, with the prescience that belongs to an itinerary trade, felt the look and raised his eyes, making gestures that invited her to buy. But she shook her head and drew back from the window.

She had not heard Mr. Martel enter. He now bent over his wife and put a little packet in her hands. She tore at the wrappings awkwardly, for her fingers shook.

"Oh, you darling," she cried, long before the covering was removed. "I know what it is. I'm just crazy over it, too. My lovely, lovely, blue necklace!" Now it was disclosed, but in trying to clasp it, the jewel fell to the floor. Martel picked it up and fastened it about

his wife's neck. He seemed unconscious of Ariadne's presence.

Mrs. Martel's face grew purple. Her pale, prominent eyes became suffused with tears: she was as one suffocating with happiness.

"Oh, Ariadne, look! Did you ever see anything lovelier? I must give you a little kiss, Connie, for being so good to me." She pulled at his hand and he leaned over, turning his smooth cheek. She pressed tremulous, fervent lips to it.

"Now," she said to them both, "I feel that a little drive in the park would do us all good. Ariadne, don't begin to back off that way. You are so contrary. Of course you are going, too."

"What hat will you wear, Madonna?" asked the girl. "I'll get it for you."

"The big black one, with plumes and pink roses," Mrs. Martel replied, "and I don't think I'll need anything heavier than my charmeuse coat. It is a perfect day."

As Ariadne went to get them, she heard the happy, excited voice hurrying on: "I was just saying, as you came in, Connie, that London is having a magical effect on all of us. I feel better than I have for years, and I've given up all idea of that heart specialist. If there really was anything wrong, you have cured it already." She patted his hand. "I believe there was something uncanny about the Hague and that old hotel. Ugh! It makes me shudder just to think of it. I'll never consent to go back there. The last week especially — you were so strange, and then Ariadne had that accident — and her crazy little doctor tried to frighten me to death. What was it about that last week, anyway?" She paused, looking up to his dark face for a reply.

Ariadne was coming toward her with the coat and hat. The girl paused, her eyes downcast.

"I should say it was all a matter of your own nerves, my dear," he answered. "Of course Ariadne had a bit of a fright in the storm, but Sir Galahad was there to the rescue."

Ariadne bit her lip. Was this a random shot, or had this man heard Randy's legal nickname?

"Sir Galahad!" echoed Donna. "Oh, you mean that Carr man. Ariadne is through and done with him; she's just told me so. I'll put the hat on here, Ariadne. Please let me have two of the long pins. She's told me something else too, Connie, something that will please you. That old Judge Henry is actually on his way to London."

Ariadne felt the man's sudden start and his look of inquiry.

"Of course it is in answer to my letter; what else could it be?" Mrs. Martel went on. "And when we have that money, there will be nothing to worry about, will there, dearest?" She smiled fondly on her husband, who stood back a little as Ariadne advanced with the coat. Donna rose to her feet. Every motion was made with apparent ease and lightness. She held out one arm and then the other, and when the coat was on, began searching over the dresser for a certain brooch. This was a miniature of her husband, done by a famous Parisian artist, and set in pearls.

She did not notice that Martel had made no answer to her last remark. "Ah, here it is," she said, taking up the pin. "Now, Ariadne, get on a light coat and your pretty blue little motor-bonnet — the one with long strings."

"Madonna — really — if you don't mind," said Ariadne in a distressed voice.

Mr. Martel put an arm over his wife's shoulder and turned her toward the door. His caressing voice was low, but entirely audible. "You must think of me, little woman; I greatly prefer having you to myself."

"Oh, Connie," she said, with a delighted laugh. "You know how I feel too — but poor Ariadne."

"You can take her another time, when I have letters to write."

She lifted her head and whispered something. Without a spoken reply, the man took down his arm, thrust two languid fingers into his waistcoat pocket, and sauntered across the room.

"Your mother wants you to have this," he said, extending a gold coin. Ariadne looked at him. He smiled, gave an incipient shrug, and laid the money gently upon the corner of the dressing-table nearest her. Then he went back to Donna, again encircled her with his arm, and moved toward the door. On the threshold he turned his face, and meeting Ariadne's eyes, gave her a long look of malignant triumph.

When they were out of hearing, the girl slowly clinched both hands and raised a face more bloodless than the wax candles near her. Anger was an emotion she had seldom felt, but now a white, burning, consuming flame of rage leaped up, scorching her very soul. Scarcely knowing that she moved, she got from the big luxurious room into her own smaller one. She locked the door and turned, still without definite consciousness of movement, when all at once a tremor caught her, and she sank, weak and shivering, into the nearest chair. Her hands were still clinched, but her head drooped heavily forward. Wave after wave of burning fury beat upon her, searing, corroding her, yet her body was like ice. As molten steel, plunged into such extremities, takes

on another nature, she felt that her very essence was changing. What did she care? What had life brought to the girl, Ariadne, that she should wish to remain unchanged? Let her be transmuted into a sword — a demon — a disembodied vengeance. Let her retrieve by full and answering torment the wrongs of that slain young life that had been called Ariadne.

Her teeth chattered, and through the tortured mind flamed her despair. "This is the end of it all. Something I used to think my soul has gone. It is frightened. It will never come back. But I am not frightened. I am strong. Let the heat come; it only freezes me. Ariadne kept faith with her father. But I am not Ariadne. She had too much to endure. Poor little Ariadne — who is dead, and who tried so hard to be good."

A sob rose in the strained throat. She struck at it with the back of her hand. This new creature, now in the throes of fire-birth, could not allow human weakness.

"I must not think back for one moment," she told herself fiercely. "These people have gorged themselves upon my heart. They took away my love from me. I have been manacled and blindfolded with useless promises. Now I am free. I will live my own life. I will go from these vultures, taking what is mine. Let them make the best of it. I've served them all these years. They have had my youth and happiness — and now for them, I am losing — Oh, I don't know what it is — I am afraid to think —"

She struggled to her feet, staring dreadfully. "I tell you I will not think," she cried aloud, as to another presence. "My father had no right to bind me. I must have life a little while. I shall have it."

She closed her eyes, and the shivering phantoms



again possessed her. Through them, like a gentle, fearless hand, a whisper seemed to come. "My little daughter, my precious little chum, I know I can trust you."

"Oh, father — father!" she cried in agony. "I've kept faith until now, but I can't do it any longer. I'll give the money back to Donna, keeping just enough to live upon. But you couldn't have known that she would bring this vileness into our lives. You can't want me to stay near him. I have never failed when she really needed me. I gave up my lover for a promise that was not needed. She is well again. She has everything. With the money she can pay off whatever threatens the creature she loves. No one needs me any longer. Let me go by myself. I cannot face endless years of this humiliation. Oh, father, did you see his face as he held the money out to me?"

She peered into memory, like some stricken thing in a jungle, seeking a secret, hidden path, but the vision and the memory were gone.

The waves of passion, too, were ebbing. They cringed and whimpered at her feet. The ice around her heart broke up; at the first warm flood of tears she knew that her demon had lost forever the stake for which he had played.

She sobbed on quietly, facing now without rebellion the long stretch of arid life to come. She knew she was bound, not only by her father's will, but by the deepest fibers of her own nature. There was nothing for her but a gray, negative submission. She must go on, being at once her stepmother's slave and her source of livelihood. She must remain an uncomplaining victim. How long she sat there, facing the desert, she would never know.

At times of utter hopelessness, a minute or an hour count for the same in a span of time. Nothing mattered or ever again could really matter.

A timid knock came for a second time at the door before she could rouse herself to answer. Probably it was a bell-boy summoning her to luncheon. She opened. Cummins stood there, her face twitching with excitement.

"Oh, come, Miss — quick — quick!" she gasped. "Mrs. Martel 'as fainted in the lift. They can't bring 'er to. A doctor has been sent for. Mr. Martel's going on like a mad creature. He thinks she's dying."

Without a thought of her disordered hair, her tear-swollen eyes, Ariadne followed the maid to her step-mother's room.

## CHAPTER II

NEXT morning Ariadne woke with a start. Her one window, screened with heavy curtains, let in no more light than early dawn could give: yet she knew by instinct that the hour was, for her, unusually late. She had slept as one drugged. Though now she sat up in bed, feeling toward the stand for her small traveling clock, memory and consciousness had not returned. Something terrible — immediate — had happened. It was to Donna.

It came back now in a tide of horror. For hours the doctors had battled for Donna's life. It had been she, Ariadne, who had told them of Doctor Bergen and his tentative diagnosis. Fortunately, she could remember and repeat the name of the London specialist who had been recommended. Afterward — a long time afterward — it seemed, the great surgeon had come; he and the physicians held a somber consultation. What they had said to Mr. Martel the girl could only guess. When, after midnight, she had finally come to her room, a trained nurse sat beside the sick woman, and it was understood that next day Mrs. Martel was to be taken to a nursing home in Wimpole Street.

Ariadne looked at the clock. It was after ten. She rang the bell sharply. To her relief Cummins entered.

"How is she now?" the girl questioned, in a sort of terror.

"She's easy-like now, Miss. There's nothin' for you to worry about. Shall I make your bath?"

"Yes, at once, and have some breakfast brought to me here. I don't care what it is. Has the hour been set for taking her to the hospital?"

"Rich folks don't go to 'ospitals over here, Miss Skipwith. I believe it's just at noon they'll fetch 'er to the Nursing 'Ome."

"Is Mr. Martel with her?"

"No, Miss. She have coaxed 'im to go for a little walk. And 'e needs it. I never saw a gentleman take on like 'im — all the 'otel servants are talking of it."

"That will please poor Donna," thought the girl.

After the bath and breakfast she went to her step-mother's room, and but for the contrast with the more ghastly face of the night before, Ariadne would have felt alarm. The sick woman was in bed, propped up slightly among pillows. As Ariadne approached her, she gave a welcoming smile.

"Oh, Donna," cried the girl, "you did give us such a fright! I'm so thankful you are better now."

"I suppose I was too happy yesterday," said the older woman; "they all insist that I shall go into a Nursing Home and receive regular treatment. You don't think I can get out of it, do you, nurse?"

"I'm not at liberty to express a personal opinion," said the nurse, primly.

The invalid looked like a slapped child. Ariadne gave her hand a loving little squeeze, but the awkwardness of the moment was broken by the quick, professional rap of the bell-boy. Ariadne went to the door and took from a small silver salver two visiting cards.

"It's Cousin Judge Henry! He's in the drawing-room now." She flashed around to the bell-boy. "Say I shall be down in a moment, please. Oh, Donna, isn't it splendid he's here! I suppose you couldn't see

him," she gave a hurried glance toward the nurse's austere, white-clad form.

"But I must, I simply must," Mrs. Martel exclaimed. "Don't keep him waiting, Ariadne. When nurse has me ready, I'll send down word."

The girl, venturing one more look at the Englishwoman, this time of pleading, hurried out. She could not wait for the lift. She took the curved stairways like a faun. Judge Henry rose as she entered, and, seeing her hesitate for a shy instant, leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"Well — well — little Ariadne of Allan Water," he said, "and such a traveler, such a woman of the world, as you have become."

"I'm just the same Ariadne, even if I look different. Oh, Cousin Judge!" she cried, "it is so good to see you again. You haven't changed a particle; and how is Grandma and Cousin Nellie — and dear little Dick Carter? Why, little Dick must be a great big boy by now."

"There's a good deal more of him in every way," laughed the Judge, "especially as to mischief. But you will soon see for yourself."

"Oh, if I could only go back home!" the girl sighed, "but there isn't any hope of it."

The Judge opened his lips to speak, but checked himself. His kind eyes shone with some secret pleasure. Then he said in an ordinary tone: "But I am here to find out more about you, dear child. Come, sit here beside me. Remember I was your father's best friend. I have had many hours of sadness because of the impossibility of being near his daughter."

"But you are here now," said Ariadne, smiling.

The Judge sighed. His pleasant face became very

grave. "Yes, I am here — and not altogether on pleasant business. The fact is, Ariadne, a most distressing situation has come to light. I regret deeply that you should have to know such things at all —" He hesitated and was plainly embarrassed.

"It is something about Mr. Martel?"

"Yes," said the Judge. "Your own pure instinct would lead you to suspect such a man. He is — to put it plainly — a scoundrel, an adventurer of the lowest type. Neither you nor Ransome's widow can be allowed to remain with him any longer."

As briefly as he could, and with many pauses to find suitable words for a young girl's hearing, he told her of Martel's previous marriage and the suit brought by his wife for false divorce. "You knew, perhaps, that your stepmother had written me very urgently for a large sum of money," he added. "Of course it is to pay this blackmail. Has she any idea of the man's real need of it?"

"None in the world. And oh, Cousin Judge, you cannot tell her yet. She is very ill."

"Do you mean that she is in a serious — a dangerous condition?"

"I do, indeed. We thought she was dying yesterday. She is to be taken to a hospital, within a few hours. There may be an operation." Her voice lowered on the last word. She feared that even this allusion encroached upon her promise to Donna.

The Judge frowned, tapping the chair nervously with his long finger.

"But this is distressing — most distressing. It complicates everything!" he said. "However, she may soon recover. In these days of science, an operation can be often taken quite lightly."

"Not the kind she will have," protested Ariadne. "I must not say any more about it — but oh, Cousin Judge — if the nurse lets her send for you, do be very, very kind."

"You may rely on my courtesy to a lady," the Virginian said.

"I know that — of course," said Ariadne, smiling back at him. "But I want you to be more than courteous, or even kind. She thinks you have come to bring her the money. Oh, I hope you have. If I have any influence at all in getting it, — I mean about my signature, — I want to help her to get it."

"You desire to place twenty thousand dollars out of your father's capital in the hands of a scamp like Martel?"

"I'm not thinking of him, or what he will do with it," said the girl. "It is for Donna, to make her happy."

The Judge's eyes grew puzzled and a little curious. "Has she, then, shown you such consistent tenderness that you are willing to make this further sacrifice?"

"Next to her husband, she cares for me," answered the girl. Then, an instant later, she looked more directly into his face, and added, "Yes, in her own way Donna loves me — and she needs me."

The Judge leaned over and took one of the slender hands in his own.

"But you, Ariadne? Remember that my first consideration must always be for you. What can such people have been able to give you in return?" She turned away a little, lowering her eyes. His gentle voice went on. "That they have not really harmed you I can see from the candor and purity of your face; and yet this intimate life with them, this daily and almost hourly companionship, especially with a degen-

erate like Martel, cannot entirely have satisfied you. I beg you to speak to me freely. It is my affection that prompts these somewhat presumptuous queries."

Ariadne's hand had been lying passively in his. She withdrew it now. Her head was lowered, and her young face had become intensely sad. Now, with a little gesture of yielding, she let both hands fall into her lap, and then resolutely lifted her head and fixed her clear, truthful eyes on his.

"Then I will tell you. I don't think that Donna has ever dreamed of it, but in all these seven years, there has not been one minute when my heart was not aching for home and for my own people."

Judge Henry leaned back in his chair and passed his long fingers slowly across his forehead.

"This is as I feared," he said at length; "it could not have been otherwise."

For a while they sat in silence. Heavy thoughts hung between them, and then the Judge, again taking her hand, began to speak.

"In the eyes of the world, my dear, I may still be counted as old-fashioned — a man bred to ideas of honor and of right conduct that to our modern standards seems over-scrupulous and even Quixotic. But down in the hearts of all decent people there still survives a reverence for that beautiful thing called loyalty. You were only a child when a strange and almost cruel task was put upon you. Events your poor father could not have foreseen have made your burden well-nigh unbearable. For seven years you have borne it in uncomplaining sweetness. There is no touch of bitterness in your young face or in your eyes, and yet there is not a man I know who could have endured and kept faith with himself and with his obligations as you have



done. My child, I reverence and honor you. As a Virginian I am proud of you, and as a man who puts before all else the integrity of a human soul, I bow before you — and kiss the little hand, so strong, so brave, and yet so girlishly tender. God has you in his keeping, dear child. Great happiness must yet be your portion."

Ariadne's upturned eyes had not left his. When the gray head bent toward her, she still gazed on, the luminous beauty of her face deepening. She felt no sense of deprecation or of embarrassment. The old man's words had been a benediction. As he raised his face, she saw that tears stood in his kind brown eyes. No moisture touched her own. She answered him now as soul to soul.

"I have kept faith with my father, and at times it has been very, very hard. I've never felt that it was a thing that could be praised in me. There was nothing else I could do. But now — for you to speak to me like this — it makes me see that the suffering and the homesickness have not been entirely wasted; why, it is as if you had put a crown on me. I don't deserve it all, — there have been times of rebellion and wicked thoughts, — but I shall always carry my head, I think, as if your crown were there."

"You are one of those children of righteousness of whom Wordsworth sings, my dear :

" 'Souls without one stain or blot  
Who do God's will and know it not.' "

Without quite knowing why, both had risen, and now stood at the window, looking down with unseeing eyes into the narrow street.

Cummins approached them softly. As Judge Henry

turned, the maid said, "Mrs. Martel's compliments, sir, and she is allowed to see you for a few moments."

"Certainly, at once," he replied, gathering up his hat, gloves, and stick.

"Shall I come, too?" Ariadne whispered.

"Yes, at any rate, at first. If she desires a private interview, I shall, of course, grant it."

Mrs. Martel was in a flowered silk wrapper, propped among colored pillows at the end of a long divan. The trained nurse, with disapprobation written clearly across her starched white back, was just leaving by another door.

It needed all Judge Henry's self-control to keep from his face the shock that the first sight of the sick woman gave him. The hand of welcome stretched toward him was the color of clay, and the touch, moist, heavy, and dead, brought a shudder to the living fingers that grasped it.

She began talking at once. "Oh, I'm so thankful you got here, Judge Henry, before they carried me off to that wretched Nursing Home. It will be such a relief to me to have all this money question settled. Of course you came over for that. Dear Connie will be so pleased. And now there will be somebody to look after Ariadne when I'm taken away. Of course she could stay on here with Connie. He is perfectly devoted to her. But he will want to be at the Home with me a good deal, and Ariadne might find it lonely. Don't you think she has become a fine, tall girl, Judge?"

She turned her eyes from one to another of her somewhat embarrassed visitors, letting them rest with unmistakable affection on the younger face.

"Ariadne is a dear, good child, too, just a little quiet for a girl," Mrs. Martel continued. "But as I often

say, no sister of my own could be more to me than poor Ransome's child. I've always tried to do my duty by her, Judge Henry."

"Your intentions do you credit, dear lady. And now may I speak a moment of my cousin's plans?"

"Yes, but don't take long. That dragon of a nurse will be back in a minute — and of course it's the money that I'm interested in."

"I perceive that," said the visitor, a little dryly. "The other, and less important matter, can be quickly disposed of. I am at the Morley in Trafalgar Square, an old-fashioned but most respectable hotel. I suggest that I take Ariadne back with me now, and I will get her a room there. It will be more appropriate, I think, than for her to remain at this hotel."

At Ariadne's eager assent, the sick woman moved her head fretfully.

"I suppose it would from your point of view, Judge Henry, but I assure you that my husband is perfectly capable of looking after her. He has done so long enough."

"Exactly," said the Judge. "Quite long enough — which makes a stronger reason why I should now assume some responsibility. Besides, there is something at the hotel that I have brought from Virginia and that I want my cousin to see. You can easily keep in touch with her by telephone."

"Have it your own way," said Mrs. Martel. "Suppose you go and pack your dressing-case now, Ariadne. I'd like to see Judge Henry alone for a moment."

The girl flew from the room and called over her shoulder. "I'm in Number forty-six on the same floor, Cousin Judge, if you want me."

The moment they were alone, Mrs. Martel sat up,

though the effort brought a more ghastly pallor. She pressed her hand instinctively to her side. The Judge hastened to draw a chair near her.

"The money," she gasped, when she could speak at all, "is it with you now?" Again the corpse-like hand went out.

The Judge cleared his throat to gain time. "No, it is not with me. One does not carry about so large a sum. In fact, my dear Madam —"

"Oh, don't tell me there's going to be any red tape and legal delays," the other broke in. "We are being horribly pressed for it. As you know, Mr. Martel made some unfortunate speculation in Paris. He will never attempt this sort of thing again. He promised me, and I can trust him. Ariadne wants you to raise the money just as much as I do."

"So she has told me," said the Judge. "Ah, what a noble, what an exquisite young woman she has become!"

"What with this illness of mine, and having to go to a nursing home, and those French creatures tormenting him to death for the money, my poor husband is almost out of his mind."

"That is deplorable, of course," said the Judge, "but what you ladies seldom realize in matters of finance is the difficulty of getting together these large sums in actual cash. Your late husband's fortune is all in the form of investments. From these investments your income is derived."

"But there are ways of raising money on investments. Don't they have margins that can be turned into cash, or you could sell something? I know there was some sort of a mine in West Virginia. Why don't you sell the mine?"

Judge Henry sighed. There was no use attempting

explanation. So he repeated, a little hopelessly, "It is practically impossible to raise so large a sum at such short notice."

"If you haven't brought the money, why did you come at all?" she questioned sharply.

The Judge was disconcerted. His eyes fell. "I must confess to other motives for my visit. Perhaps the strongest was to see my young relative."

"You mean Ariadne! Well, I've told you that she wishes it, too. She is one of us. If you don't help Connie out of this difficulty, Ariadne will suffer as much as he and I will. You must see that. Her father made his will so that she could not leave us."

"Pardon me," said the Judge a little sternly. "Ransome Skipwith, in his tender solicitude for your welfare and his belief in Ariadne's splendid qualities of mind and heart, was led into making an arrangement which has proved altogether unjust to his only child. Surely, you cannot imagine that he considered the possibility of your remarriage."

Mrs. Martel flushed through all the waxen pallor. "Are you trying to say that I led him into making such a will?"

"That is neither here nor there, Mrs. Martel. I have carried out my friend's peculiar wishes in the spirit as well as the letter. His increasing income has been paid to you and not to his daughter."

"And I have shared it — every penny — with Ariadne — you can ask her if I haven't."

That she was a sick woman, the Judge knew. The touch of death was on her now, and if death came, it brought to Ariadne absolute freedom; but at these last words, he could not forbear a long, stern look into the woman's eyes. For an instant she defied him, then

sank back among the gaudy cushions, covering her face.

"You mean about the money that I want for Connie. It is a different thing, I admit, but I must have it. I must, Judge Henry. He never lets me alone a minute. If only this can be paid, — and I am well again, — we can begin a new life together."

"And Ariadne?"

"She will be with us, of course. She would not leave me — not for all the Virginia relatives on earth." She flashed a sly look of triumph, unspeakably pathetic from such death-haunted eyes.

As he still remained silent, his brows drawn with thought, she rallied, and, clapping her hands, cried out: "Why, I have it! You can lend us the money and then take it, little by little, from the income."

This was a turn of affairs the Judge had not foreseen. At first it appeared only a deeper and more painful problem. He was determined that the man calling himself Martel should not free himself from debt at Ariadne's future expense. Under the laws of his trusteeship that thing had, from the first, been impossible; but now, in this more personal appeal, he saw a chance of temporizing. He felt how eagerly the sunken eyes were watching him. He chose his next words carefully.

"This possible escape from your difficulties had not occurred to me. I will not say it cannot be done. But I shall have to give myself a little time to think it over."

"And why should you think it over? You are a rich man."

"Again it is a matter of investments," he replied. "My letter of credit, now at a London bank, is for exactly four hundred pounds. That, you'll admit, would not go far toward your — your husband's debt."

She shook her head.

"I would have to do much cabling to New York. I'm not known in London."

"But you will cable. Promise me you will," she implored.

"I'll do the very best within my power for you and Ariadne," he evaded, getting to his feet. "And now I think I must be going."

"Please touch that bell, then," she said; "I want to bid Ariadne good-by. You will let her come to see me to-morrow at the Nursing Home?"

"To be sure. In fact, I'm convinced that no one could keep her from you, even if they wished."

"And you will begin cabling at once?" Before he could answer, Cummins had entered and been sent for Ariadne. To Judge Henry's great relief the girl responded at once. She went up to her stepmother, kneeling beside the couch.

"You don't mind, do you, Donna? Mr. Martel is going with you to the Home, and you don't need me. But if you feel lonely, even for a minute, after you get there, and if he should have to leave you, tell one of the nurses to ring me up at the Morley, and I'll get into a taxi and come at once. Now promise me."

The Judge, watching the two women, thought Ariadne's face that of an angel, pleading with some suffering mortal for its own salvation, but the sick woman only moved restlessly, and, without looking into the beautiful eyes so near her own, said in a querulous voice: "Oh, you won't be thinking of me; I shan't trouble you. Connie will let you know when I can see you at the Home."

The nurse entered and walked up to the couch. "My patient must have a little nourishment now and an hour's rest, before the doctor comes for her."

"Come, Ariadne," said the Judge, putting his hand upon the girl's shoulder. But she broke from him to go once more to the bedside.

"Good-by, Madonna. Oh, do take the best care of yourself and get well quickly. I shall telephone the Home every hour to know how you are getting along." She kissed the flaccid cheek, so indifferently held toward her, but at the last moment something stirred in the sick woman's heart. She put up both her arms and drew the girl close.

"Good-by, my dear," she whispered. "I know I've been cross, but I'm so worried about this money. I hope you'll have a lovely little holiday. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good-by, good-by," said Ariadne. Her last look from the doorway at Mrs. Martel met a smile of unusual sweetness.

Just outside the door she said to Judge Henry, in a voice that shook: "You see she cares for me."

They rang the bell for the lift, and as it came, they saw the figure of a man within. Ariadne instinctively fell back, but Martel, after a quick glance from her face to that of the tall American, stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Judge Henry, I am sure?"

The lift was waiting. Judge Henry, ignoring the outstretched hand, lifted his hat slightly and slipped past the iron grating, followed by Ariadne. It was all done in an instant, yet much had been conveyed. Martel stood where they had left him; a look of disappointment, then indignation, and finally of slow, black hatred deepened in his face. In a moment more he had turned, giving the incipient shrug that belonged to him, and made his way to his wife's room.



The two in the elevator took the brief descent in silence, nor did they afterward refer to the unpleasant encounter. Ariadne's dressing-bag already waited near the hotel entrance. A taxi was called, and the Judge, with old-world courtesy, handed his young companion to her place. He took a seat beside her and gave the direction — "Trafalgar Square."

Not until they were well into the traffic of Regent Street did Ariadne speak. Smiling up at him, then, with a deprecating little frown that made her face very young and charming, she said: "I can't get over the feeling that I'm running away from school — playing 'hookey' as we used to say at home. I'm all full of happy little giggles inside. Yet I want to keep looking over my shoulder to see if anybody is coming after me."

"There's nobody to come," answered Judge Henry, in her own vein. "You're not a culprit yet but a very real little girl, and for a few hours I want you to try and forget all the troubles and perplexities you are now leaving and belong, as you said, to your own people."

"I shall try. It isn't wrong to Donna, for I couldn't be any help to her just now. I'm going to play that I'm your daughter, and you are driving me through London for the first time."

She looked out eagerly, commenting on the attractive shops and the broad, curving street with its throngs of taxicabs and omnibuses and the many pedestrians on the broad pavements.

After a while she said, as if to herself: "Oh, I wish Cousin Nellie had come with you."

Her companion said nothing, but as she turned to him for a question, she caught the twinkle.

"What is it you have brought from Virginia to show me, Cousin Judge?"

"Ah, that would spoil my little surprise. We are nearly there now. Here is famous Piccadilly Circus, with its fountain and flower-sellers."

Ariadne agreed. "But the funny thing to me is calling these open places 'circuses.' I always find myself looking round for the elephants and camels."

"Now we've turned into the Haymarket. That odd building with the yellowish columns is one of the oldest and best known theaters in London. There's an American farce being played there now. Another bit of incongruity."

Ariadne was reading the street signs. "There is Pall Mall. You always read about that in novels, and oh, there's the Nelson statue with the four big lions at the foot."

"Do you see just across the square — that small, yellow portico?"

"Yes. You mean the one with a boy leaning over the iron banister?"

Judge Henry gave a curious kind of chuckle. "Yes — with the boy. That's our destination."

"It must be wonderful to live right on this Square where so much is passing. And look at that boy; he has something on the end of a string. Oh, I believe it's a snake. He's frightening all the people on the sidewalk."

"Evidently a young American," said the Judge.

"He's a lovely boy, anyway," cried Ariadne. "Look at him laughing. The people are laughing, too. No one could really get angry with a face like that."

"Oh, never mind him," said Judge Henry hurriedly. "I want to get you into the hotel." He paid the driver and took Ariadne's arm, leading her swiftly up the short flight of stairs. She looked back over her shoulder,

but young America was again bent double over the iron railing, intent upon the string and its dangling burden.

"Sit here just a moment, my dear," said Judge Henry, indicating a chair in a small "lounge" just within the entrance. "I must go up and see to a room for you. Please don't move until I return."

In a very few moments he was back. His face beamed. About him was a certain suppressed excitement, all the more noticeable because of his usual quiet, almost grave demeanor.

"Come, my dear," he said, "my surprise is waiting."

They rang the bell for the lift. "It's at the top of the house, of course. They would seem to use it for an observation tower. But in due time it may descend — perhaps I should say condescend, for us. Evidently they take no chances of injury by friction," he remarked, as they started up at an almost imperceptible rate of motion. "Ah, here we are." The elevator porter threw open two iron gratings with the usual stereotyped "Thank you!" and the Judge, for once disregarding his manners, hurried along a narrow hall.

"This is the door," he said, pausing. Ariadne came up with him. By this time she too was full of suppressed excitement. Her companion waited until she was just in front of him, then, leaning forward, took the knob in his hand and threw back the door. He waited only for the low cry of amazement and the ecstatic words "Cousin Nellie!" then closed the door softly, and smiling broadly, went down-stairs to Dick Carter.

Ariadne felt as if she could never take her arms away from the warm, sweet, lovely creature, who, embracing her as strenuously, swayed back and forth, murmuring: "Ariadne — my little Ariadne — after all these years!"

"He didn't tell me you were here," said Ariadne,

"only that he had brought something from Virginia that I would like to see. I didn't dream it was you! Oh, Cousin Nellie, I—I—don't know what to do, I'm so happy. I believe I'm going to cry. No, I won't. I wish I could do like Anguish and turn hand-springs. Oh, please tell me everything about home."

"You've got to sit down," said Cousin Nellie, herself between tears and laughter. "My knees feel like soft-shelled crabs. Here, take this chair right opposite, so I can look at you. Did you see Dick Kyarter downstairs?"

"Was that Dick Carter leaning over the gallery railing?"

"Sounds like him. He generally is," laughed Dick's mother.

"I saw him and said what a lovely boy he was, but Cousin Judge wouldn't let me stop. Oh, I see why now. He wanted me to get to you first."

"Yes, we've been planning this little surprise for you, honey, and it has worked just as we planned. When I look at your face, I don't have to ask if you're glad to see me, you blessed lamb."

"Glad—glad!" cried the girl, showing by a little hopeless gesture how impossible it was to express her happiness. "Why, I feel as if all the Christmases I have missed at home were rolled into one—and come to life in you. Oh, Cousin Nellie, you are sweeter and prettier than ever. You haven't grown one day older!"

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Henry, flushing with pleasure, "I'm a regular female Methuselah. But the Judge does take good care of me. Now, I want to hear your news, my dear. We can't waste time talking about an early Victorian survival like me."

Ariadne laughed aloud at the thought. Vitality, intelligence, and loving kindness radiated from the older woman like a perfume. Her rich "honey" voice flowed about the girl like music. The very spirit of Virginia lay in its subtle accents. Ariadne leaned forward, drinking it all in. At first the words were unimportant — mere fragmentary questions concerning Ariadne's health and recent travels, to which the girl answered briefly. She did not want Cousin Nellie to stop talking.

But suddenly a change came over the speaker's face. The look of motherly solicitude, remembered well by Ariadne, came to her eyes.

"By the way, Ariadne," she said, "did Dick Kyarter have a string with a horrible, wriggling thing at the end of it?"

"I think he did. The people on the sidewalk jumped back when they saw it."

"I thought so. I do hope Judge Henry will stop him. It is a huge green worm with yellow spots, a toy that he picked up from some peddler. Last night he put it under a door across from us. The young man in the room had been on a spree, and you can imagine!" She gave a gesture of humorous despair. "Judge Henry spends his entire time apologizing for his son's misconduct. I'm sure we're going to be asked to leave the hotel. I suppose I ought to go down before he gets run in. His father pretends that I do all the spoiling — when, as a fact, I am nagging at the poor child from morning until night. Now Judge Henry, when he sees Dick doing something naughty, buys the biggest newspaper in sight and hides behind it. Maybe I should go to Dick —" She paused, hesitating, then with sudden decision said: "No, I won't; we must talk a little longer."

If the child goes to jail, his father will simply have to bail him out."

Again came the exchange of surface questions and answers — of laughter, and small hesitations as a broken thread of thought was seized, and all the eager, spoken intercourse of two hearts, once close, and now newly met after long absence. There was much the girl could not disclose. Now, as always, she felt herself surrounded by a ring of threatening, pointed spears, visible to her alone. She was never to have freedom. The desire for candor, openness, directness, all the clear virtues of a spirit innately sincere, were never to be hers.

With the elder woman — whose very breath was honesty — there was an air of broad sweetness like Lanier's southern marshes. She was "nothing withholding and free." The girl bathed in it — drank it in consciously. It was a life-giving balm after the foetid atmosphere in which for many years she had been living.

As she told of her stepmother's present illness and hinted that an operation might be necessary, Mrs. Henry's face sobered. "If she is really ill; that may make a difference in the course Judge Henry will have to take with her. You know, I suppose, that she wrote him saying she must have a large sum of money at once?"

"Yes, I knew of it. I think she really needs it. I hope Cousin Judge can let her have it."

Mrs. Henry looked troubled. "In the case of her illness — since she is ill and may need an expensive operation — he will certainly find a way of helping her, but as to handing over twenty thousand dollars to that creature she's living with, it can't be done."

Ariadne was silent. She did not wish to betray a deeper knowledge of the situation.

"There are things you don't know, Ariadne — loathsome, slimy things that never should have come near you. It was an evil day for Allan Water when your father brought that poor, silly creature to it."

"She is silly, Cousin Nellie, but she has never been anything worse than silly. She has always been good to me in her own way. I think she loves me and has always needed me, though, of course, her idol, her one dominant passion, is that dreadful man."

"How has he treated you, Ariadne?"

The girl shuddered. "Don't ask me; I can't bear to think of him. At least he has never resented my being with them."

"If he knew that his bread and butter depended on it, how could he?" said Cousin Nellie bluntly.

"He hasn't always known. From the first Donna kept things from him. Only since this illness he has learned that she can't leave all the money to him."

Cousin Nellie bridled. "As if your father, even in his infatuation for that feeble Donna Mayrant, could tie you to her for life and then disinherit you after! The man must be a fool!"

"I don't think him a fool," said the girl in a low voice; "but I know him to be as wicked a man as ever lived."

"A villain is always more or less of a fool, simply because evil never works out to the end. A smash is always bound to come, and it is then that decent people have a struggle against their own decency — not to be too glad. But you are right, my dear; he is about as bad as they are made, and when his — his wife gets over this trouble of hers, I think we'll find a way of getting him out of her life — and yours — forever."

"You don't realize his power, Cousin Nellie. There is nothing — absolutely nothing — that you or any one

else could do to keep her from him if he chose to beckon to her."

"You don't know what you're talking about, child. There are certain things that the most abject of women wouldn't put up with." She spoke vehemently, but even in the speaking a fear touched her that Ariadne was right. "At least you shall not be allowed to remain with such people," she added, and this time her lips closed with a determination that showed the intensity of the resolve.

"Nothing can be done just now, at any rate," said the girl. "Oh, Cousin Nellie, don't let's talk of them any more. I was just beginning to feel clean again."

"Well, we won't," said Mrs. Henry, patting the entreating hand upon her arm. "Besides, there's something very special I want to ask about." Her eyes brightened, and she looked directly at the girl, with a certain mischief in them that made those of Ariadne fall. Her heart gave one great bound, then seemed to stand still, quivering. She knew what name would next be spoken.

"What did you think of Randy Carr?" Ariadne felt the hot tide of blood rush into her drooping face. Cousin Nellie gave her low, delicious chuckle. "Isn't he the best looking thing in his fashionable clothes?"

Still from the girl no answer.

"The Judge and I told him that he would probably run across you — as he did."

"Yes, at the Hague. He came to the same hotel."

"You must have enjoyed meeting some one so recently from home. Anybody would have seemed good — even if they didn't have six feet of Virginia bone and muscle — not to mention brown eyes and a grin like a small boy caught in a cherry tree. I hope Dick Kyarter has that same grin. If he'd only brush his teeth,



though. Dick, I mean, not Randy. Randy's are the whitest I ever saw in a human head — unless it's those of the little nigger, Anguish. When Anguish meets me at the station, I always think of pop-corn, popping suddenly out of soot. You and Randy must have had some wonderful long talks together."

"We did," said Ariadne, "but then this sickness of Donna's came — and we had to come away."

"What puzzles me," went on Cousin Nellie, her shrewd eyes watching the changing expressions on the young face, "is why, after all that cabling and his evident intention of meeting us here in London, he suddenly took a steamer and rushed back home."

"Has he gone back home?"

"Yes, didn't you know it? He may be landing in New York to-day. It was one of the fast steamers, the *Olympic*, I believe."

"They did fall in love just as I thought they would, and there has been a lovers' quarrel," was the elder woman's inward guess.

"I'll tell you the truth, Cousin Nellie," said the girl. "I want you to see that I can't talk of Randolph, either. At first we were good friends. He talked of home, and I was very happy in our friendship. But in a little while — something happened to change it — I disappointed him. He became very angry. He never wants to see me again."

"Stuff and nonsense!" rose to the other's lips, but she held the words back. Whatever the silly misunderstanding, Cousin Nellie saw that to Ariadne it was final. All the light went from the girl's face. She moved restlessly. Cousin Nellie rose, the girl following quickly.

"We must go down now. It is luncheon time," said Mrs. Henry. "You needn't change anything for

lunch, Ariadne. That's one of the good things about this hotel. You can wear anything you please. I must go first and see if Richard Kyarter Junior is at large and make him wash his hands."

They went down rather silently. Mrs. Henry found herself puzzled and not a little distressed, by Ariadne's avoidance of Randy Carr's name. It was incredible that she had really offended him, unless in the one way of rejected love. There had scarcely been time for courtship — even from so spirited a youth as Carr. The kindly woman felt by instinct that, even were love a part of it, the breaking of the friendship had a deeper and more painful cause. Being possessed of tact, as well as intuition, she resolved to say no more about it, at least until she had had time to reason.

They went directly to the portico. Just as they reached it, the boy, still at his mischievous employment, leaned over an inch too far and gave a perilous lurch. Mrs. Henry, with a stifled shriek, clutched at his Eton jacket.

"You, Dick Kyarter," she cried, when he was back into safety, "you'll fall over there and break your neck."

A series of feminine shrieks from the pavement below, cries of: "My word, it's one of them American terrors!" bespoke a fresh success for the small boy. A suffragette, standing at the corner selling papers, and a tall, blue-clad "Bobby" stared toward the portico.

"Now, look here, Dick, this has got to stop," said the mother. She leaned beside him, pulling up the realistic viper. "That policeman has his eye on you, and he'll be taking you to jail next. Then how would mother feel having you shut up with all the suffragettes?"

Dick opposed the withdrawal of his toy, but his

struggle was a mere feint. The sight of the policeman had sobered him.

"Here's your cousin Ariadne, Dick. Is your hand fit to offer anybody?" Dick turned his scowling, handsome face to Ariadne. The sight of her smile softened him, and he glanced at his very dirty hands.

"Never mind dirt," said the girl, "I'm going to hug you, even if you are such a big boy. You've grown so big I never should have known you. How old are you now, Dick Carter?"

"Nine, goin' on ten," said Dick glibly, though in a tone which showed that he was bored.

Ariadne flashed a look at Mrs. Henry. "He is a perfect darling," she whispered.

"He's a limb of Satan," observed the beaming mother, more audibly. "Now, Dick, we must be going in to luncheon; you had better brush up a little. Let me see your hands." The child looked sulky, then held forth two objects that might have been grimy starfish.

"Good gracious! I should think they did need washing! Well, come along; mother will help you get the dirt off. You shall have some of my nice sweet soap." She took her small son by the arm and had started indoors, when he wrenched himself away with a shriek: "Gee! There's a man with chewing gum." He dashed down the steps, running full tilt into an English ecclesiastic, and then out upon the crowded pavement, pushing and forging his way until he stood before a lad who carried a shallow tray strapped to his shoulders. His stock in trade was a heap of small pink packages of a well-known American make of gum. A white banner descended from the tray and on it was printed boldly: "Try it, *id.* a stick. Everybody's chewing it, chewing it — chewing it!"

"Rather progressive for England," said Cousin Nellie, with a laugh.

"Dickie's a perfect darling," said Ariadne, "and he's better looking than ever."

"Yes, he has that bronze coloring and the bright eyes of the Randolphins. Judge Henry's mother was a Randolph, you know. Don't you think Dick is a good deal like Randy Carr?"

Ariadne murmured something.

"There's nothing really bad about Dick Kyarter," went on Mrs. Henry, enlarging on her dearest theme, "only he's so quick and active that he's always in mischief. When I first saw this hotel and those two ponds out in the square in front of it, I was simply frantic. I knew that Dick Kyarter would manage to get drowned in one of them. Of course Judge Henry laughed. He always does. He tried to argue with me, but I wouldn't have it. 'You needn't tell me again about your father and mother's honeymoon,' I said. 'It's nothing to me if all your ancestors back to Adam stopped at the Morley. What would be the use of it, anyway, if you brought their only descendant here to be drowned?' Where is Judge Henry, by the way? I don't dare to leave this porch until that awful child gets back. Will you go into the coffee-room, Ariadne? It's there to the right. You just keep going till you stop — down that dark passage that looks like a rope-walk. When you see a group of silent, human creatures, both men and women, sitting about, all looking as if they had just viewed the corpse, you'll know you've reached an English coffee-room. Then go up to the biggest newspaper being held up in the air, and behind it you will find Judge Henry."

This description was no more graphic than it proved truthful. Judge Henry was soon found, and the little

party — Dick having had his starfish scoured — went in to their luncheon.

"Cold meats," murmured Mrs. Henry, as she took up the menu. "I should say there were cold meats. There is a long table full of them in the middle of the room. There's the preacher and his wife walking round and round it, looking to see what they want to eat. What bad manners! I'm glad it was the preacher and not his wife Dick butted into on the steps. All that jet stuff of hers might have cut his forehead; but the parson was nice and soft. One hot dish — from a joint, it says," reverting to the menu. "I wonder what sort of a joint. So many things have joints — and after that, stewed fruit and custard. Rather slim pickings for a whole meal, it seems to me." She threw down the card.

"In contrast with your own table, it is rather meager," said the Judge, "but I daresay we can get enough to sustain us. Shall I order?"

"Please," said Ariadne and Nellie in a breath.

"I wish I was home," announced Dick Carter abruptly. Ariadne gave him a sympathetic smile. Yes, he was like Randy. His brown hair grew upon the temples just that way, and the dark, straight brows — she had seen other brows that drew together when something had gone wrong — deepening into shadow the sparkle of hazel eyes.

It was a delightful meal. The Judge had had the good fortune to preëempt a table that stood quite exclusively in the jutting corner of the second story room. From the windows they could look out upon the crowded life of the square: the thousand pedestrians hurrying on various ways, delivery wagons, motors, bicycles, peddlers' carts, and the huge, dominating omnibuses, packed

closely within and set thick on top with rosy-faced, English folk who preferred the sun and air.

From the narrow Strand, from Whitehall, Victoria, Pall Mall, and a dozen lesser streets, the tide of traffic and humanity flowed inward, emptying and filling so evenly that the moving surface had no eddies of pause. There was no whizzing and clanging of electric cars, only the reverberating roar of wheels, and the sharp, nasal warning of motor horns.

"What I wish," said Cousin Nellie, "is that I had sense enough to stop looking out of the window. It makes me dizzy, yet I can't stop."

"There ain't nothin' to look at," grumbled young Richard, scowling upon the unconscious omnibuses.

"Oh, Dick Kyarter, where do you get your grammar?" his mother exclaimed.

"He doesn't," said Judge Henry.

"Why, Dickie, don't you like the splendid big city?" asked Ariadne, partly to divert reproof.

"Naw!" said the boy, "it's nothin' but people and dirty houses. There ain't any street-cars, or soda-water fountains, or pop-corn or nothin'. I've only been to a movin' picture once."

"Never mind, if I can be here for a few days, I'll get you to take me to lots and lots of them. I love them, too."

Dick Carter turned and for the first time regarded her with interest.

"Will you, honest?"

"Honest — cross my heart," said Ariadne, performing with solemnity that mystic rite. At last his brown eyes sparkled and the grin came. "Why don't you live with us now?"

"Oh, Dickie, I'd love it," she answered, in a voice

which for once and all made the boy her friend. As she noted the lovely smile on the girl's face, Cousin Nellie asked herself: "Is that all for Dickie, or is she thinking of another pair of brown eyes?"

"Speaking of shows," put in Judge Henry, "how would you girls like to take on a matinée?"

Ariadne gave a little cry of pleasure. "I haven't been in an English theater for years and years. It would be such a treat to hear the people on the stage speaking my own language."

"Then that's settled," said Cousin Nellie in her decisive way.

"Muddie, can't I go too?" asked Dick.

"Now, Dick Kyarter, you are very young for regular theaters," that lady began, but Ariadne, interrupting quickly, put her hand on the boy's shoulder, and looking at her cousin said: "Please, for my sake, Cousin Nellie."

"Well, for your sake, Ariadne," said Mrs. Henry, trying to look disapproving.

"Never was concession made more cheerfully," remarked the Judge, unconscious of the fact that his own pleasure was quite plain.

"I'd a heap rather it was a movin' picture," growled the object of all this satisfaction.

In the theater, under the spell of the lights and the charming costumes and the singing, Ariadne felt herself to be much more of a child than Dickie. The Judge, delighting in her pleasure, bought her boxes of bon-bons, which she eagerly shared with the boy, and kept her laughing even when the comedy actors were off the stage by his quaint, humorous remarks. The girl was sorry when the curtain fell and Cousin Nellie began to put on her veil.

Although it was nearly six o'clock, the Strand was

brimming with sunlight when they emerged from the dusky foyer. The world of fairyland had vanished at a touch. The people in the street seemed sordid and oppressed with care. Even the old omnibuses tottered, as if weary of incessant burdens.

"Shall we stop somewhere for tea?" asked Mrs. Henry.

"No," replied Ariadne, not waiting for the others. "I must get back to the hotel where I can telephone and ask about Donna. I haven't done it once, and I promised to call up every hour."

"Yes, we will go home," said Judge Henry. The reaction had apparently come to all. Even Dick Carter walked without comment past a cinema gallery that displayed alluring pictures of cowboys and Red Indians in combat.

As they reached the Morley, Ariadne said, "I must telephone at once, before going to my room." They all waited until a porter had made communication with the Nursing Home and ushered Ariadne into the small box. She came out in a few moments, her face very pale.

"She is no worse at present. Mr. Martel is with her. But they must have the operation almost at once. They have set ten o'clock to-morrow for it. I must be there."

"Of course, and I'll be with you," said Cousin Nellie, drawing the girl's arm through hers.

Ariadne clung to her gratefully. "Oh, it does seem horrible to think of it being so near," she said, shuddering.

"If an operation is necessary, you can't get through with it too soon," said Cousin Nellie. "And now, honey, you must have a little rest in your own room. I'm afraid there won't be any more frolicking for us to-night."



"No — no," said the girl, "I shan't be able to think of a thing but poor Donna; but oh," she cried, turning again to her cousin, "you don't know what it means to me, having you near me at such a time!"

"Well, I'm here," said Cousin Nellie cheerfully, "and there's a good deal of me, too."

"And it's all of the purest gold," said Judge Henry softly, putting his hand for a moment on his wife's silk-clad shoulder.

That night, in their own room, with both young charges tucked away, Mrs. Henry went up to her husband. He had been standing waiting for her at their sitting-room window. She leaned against him a little more helplessly than was her usual independent way, and as he put an arm about her, he said, in that voice of complete understanding which belongs to those who are happily married: "Is it about Ariadne, my dear?"

She gave a long sigh, at first tremulous, then breaking with impatience. "Of course it is Ariadne — but even more: it is the incredible injustice of things," she replied. "When I look at that child with the face of an imprisoned angel, when I think of the way she's been dragged around at the cart-tail of a knave and a fool, and how sweet, how uncomplaining, how wonderful she's been through it all, it seems to me that I've just got to go out and fight somebody."

"I'm glad that at least you think of going out for the purpose, else your Richard and I might be in danger. But seriously, dear, I do not mean to speak flippantly; I realize it all as you do. It is a miracle that she has remained so exquisite — the old Buddhist idea of the white lotos rising through slime. I have faith to believe, however, that her bondage will soon be at an end. The

shadow of death is on that poor, ailing tyrant now; she will not survive an operation."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Henry viciously.

"My dear!" expostulated the Judge, drawing back in genuine dismay.

"Well, if you can't speak your mind out to your own husband, what's the good of having married, anyway?" said Mrs. Henry, defiantly. "You know you hope she dies — and if the poor soul knew what was in store for her, she'd wish it, too. As for Ariadne —" here she gave a long pause — "There's more than one kind of bondage."

"I don't understand you, Nellie."

"Of course you don't; that's why I keep up your interest. But I'm tired now; I must get to bed. Tomorrow is going to be a pretty strenuous day for all of us."

### CHAPTER III

It was well towards noon, several days later, when Mrs. Henry, in the rôle of a very modern ministering angel, a tray in one hand and a small scourge of common sense in the other, walked down the hotel passages and stopped at Ariadne's door.

Seeing that it was not locked, she pushed it aside and entered. Things were much as she had expected to find them. Both green shades were down, and what daylight managed to filter through diffused itself in a chill, cavernous gloom.

Across the white bed lay a slim black figure, face downward. A small marble stand stood at the nearer side, and upon this Mrs. Henry set the tray, taking care to make a sharp, metallic sound in doing so. The figure on the bed did not move! Mrs. Henry looked down upon the inky silhouette for a moment, opened her lips to speak, decided against it, and then in her buoyant yet determined way, crossed to the windows, pulling up both shades.

As she came back to Ariadne, she could see that the girl was fully dressed. Two small, black-shod feet hung a little over the far edge of the bed. Her figure, always slender, was a mere strip of shadow in the unrelieved blackness of her present garb. Her right arm was thrown upward, with the elbow bent, and in this hollow her face lay hidden. Nothing was visible but the great loops and folds of her shining hair.

Mrs. Henry took her seat near this downcast fleece of gold.

"Now, look here, Ariadne," she began, "this sort of thing can't go on. It's all very well to be sorry about poor Donna's death and to show her the respect of mourning. But somebody's got to think of you, too. You can't spend the rest of your life stuck up here in a hotel room, weeping and crying your eyes out."

"I haven't been crying, Cousin Nellie," answered the girl in her natural voice. She turned in speaking, drew her slim figure up along the bed, and reaching out for a pillow, propped herself against it. The light came now full on her face. When Mrs. Henry saw the hopeless expression and the circles of weariness about the great, tearless eyes, she could not help thinking that to weep would be better than this emotionless despair.

"Then you are doing worse than crying," Mrs. Henry went on; "you are brooding, and getting yourself into a half dead-and-alive condition of mind that can't do anybody good. You've got too much sense to wish the poor soul back in the world. She could never have been a well woman again — the doctor told you that — and she went out of life without a fear."

"They never let her dream she couldn't get well," mused Ariadne; "oh, but I was glad of that. She was so utterly contented to the very last. It was wonderful for her to — to go that way, happy, and believing that everything was going to turn out right!"

"Of course it was wonderful; she went out in a blaze of glory, so to speak. Even that creature she thought she was married to showed up well, though I must say it sickened me with indignation and pity to see that look of ecstasy in her eyes as he kissed her. And then those sheaves of lilies that he sent! Poor wretch, he

has certainly lost out. But I'm thankful he's out of your life forever."

"Has anything been heard of him since?" asked Ariadne in a low voice.

Mrs. Henry gave a little "tchut" of contempt.

"Has it? The Judge has had to ask the hotel manager to let him use a back door in order to avoid the man. There were notes, telephone calls, and telegrams every hour for a day or two. I believe, however, he has given up the attempt now."

Ariadne said nothing. She was glad to turn her mind from a subject so entirely loathsome. She stared out of the window, and the look of dark brooding returned. Apparently she forgot that her cousin was near.

"Ariadne!" cried that worthy soul, taking the girl by the shoulder and giving her an impatient shake. "You've simply got to stop this hookworm stare. It is uncanny. Now you just sit up and drink some of this hot milk and eat the toast I've brought you. The maid says you never touched your breakfast. It's perfectly absurd for you to go on like this. If that feeble creature had been your own father and mother in one, you couldn't look more woebegone. You've sacrificed seven years of life to her; you've sacrificed everything a girl ought to have, so that she could give your father's money to that brute. You've more than done your duty by everybody — and now is the time to take up life for yourself. Everything is before you. No rational being can think for a minute that you ever really loved your stepmother."

Ariadne sat up in bed, reaching out one hand for the milk. "I will try to drink it if you want me to, Cousin Nellie," she said passively. "No, I don't suppose I could really love Donna in the way you mean. But I've

been so close to her for all these years. I've had nobody else. She needed me, and I know she loved me in her own fashion. I — I suppose the shock of it all — the suddenness when I thought she was getting well — and then the horror — I can't get away from —”

She paused and set down the milk without tasting it. The wide-eyed, vacant stare came back. “For her to be out there in an English cemetery — and no friends near — just those strange names all about her — and for us to go away and leave her there. I tell you, Cousin Nellie, it is horrible. Don't you see it is?”

Mrs. Henry got to her feet; one might almost say she stamped. “Drink that milk, Ariadne Skipwith. Really, you exasperate me. All that sort of talk is pure rubbish. Where on earth should she be? She's got no near relatives. The few she had were glad enough to get rid of her. As far as I can make out, she never had a friend but you, and I suppose that even you wouldn't care to have her over in the Skipwith burying-ground beside your own mother.”

Ariadne flushed under the sharp strokes. “No, no, I suppose I wouldn't,” she murmured.

“Drink that milk.”

Ariadne swallowed quickly.

“Now eat some toast.”

The girl looked despairingly at the charred crusts.

“Never mind how it looks. You're not a suffragette on a hunger-strike. I came here to talk over some plans of our own. There's no discussing things with a rag doll.”

Ariadne sighed, but managed to dispose of the toast.

Cousin Nellie's complacency returned. She came back to the bed, taking her former seat upon it. “Now you're acting like a rational being. Judge Henry has

gone this morning to the steamship offices to secure berths for America."

Ariadne had started on a new piece of toast and could not speak.

"Let me see," Cousin Nellie went on, putting her head on one side and beginning to count on her somewhat pudgy pink fingers, "this is Wednesday — Thursday — Friday — a good fast steamer leaves Saturday morning. He's going to try for that. It won't leave us any too much time. Now how about your packing?"

Ariadne looked round the room. Her steamer trunk, perched in the English way upon a carpet-covered folding stand, was in plain sight. She continued to look about until, in a more distant corner, she saw her larger trunk.

"Yes, both my trunks are here. When did they send them?"

"They' didn't," remarked Mrs. Henry with meaning. "The Judge had a Morley porter go for them. None of your stepmother's things, not even her jewels, have appeared."

"I don't want them. I hope he will keep them," cried the girl.

"Don't worry, he will," said the other. "Now, Ariadne, since you are beginning to look more like a girl and less like a piece of biscuit dough, there is something else I want to suggest."

"Yes, Cousin Nellie?" But the suggestion was not made, for just as the girl rose from the bed and stood waiting for the next words, a knock sounded.

Mrs. Henry reached the door first. Ariadne heard the bell-boy say: "The gentleman wants an answer." Mrs. Henry came back, reading the superscription with a frown. The note was sealed. Without comment, she handed it to Ariadne.

"For me," cried the girl, "who could have —" But as her fingers touched the missive, she knew. There was but one living being who had the power to inspire this uncontrollable shudder of fear and disgust.

"I can imagine," said Mrs. Henry, with compressed lips.

Ariadne read through the few lines and handed the note to her cousin.

"ARIADNE: Whatever may be your shrinking from me — and no matter how I may deserve it — I implore you now, as a last service to the one you loved and who is now at peace, to grant me an interview. I shall not keep you long. What I must say is rather for the sake of Donna than myself. My face is in the dust. I have lost and you have gained everything. Is this much to ask that you grant a condemned victim the right to say a few words? Remember that it is in Donna's name that I plead. Before God I swear that if her devoted spirit could know how desperately I need to speak with you, she would add her supplication to mine.

"CONSTANTINE MARTEL."

Mrs. Henry flung down the letter. Her cheeks burned with indignation. "The idea! Of course you won't see him. A creature that doesn't even sign his own name. I'll have the servants turn him out." She was moving quickly to the door, when Ariadne called out sharply: "Stop, Cousin Nellie, don't turn him away. I must see him!"

"Well!" gasped Mrs. Henry, leaning against the steamer trunk.

"If you will go with me, no harm can possibly come of



it. And it is, as he says, the very last thing I can do for Donna. Please don't be angry with me, Cousin Nellie."

"You're a pigeon, a regular easy mark. You ought to have a keeper, Ariadne," said Mrs. Henry. "But if you're bent on seeing him, I can't prevent you." Opening the door, she said sharply: "Show the man into my private sitting-room, number twenty-seven on the second floor."

Ariadne sank back on the bed an instant, closing her eyes. "Don't think I want to. It is torture to me, just being in the room with him. You don't know — But when I think of Donna lying there in a bed of his white lilies, her poor face so peaceful, because, at the last, he had been kind — oh, I must, Cousin Nellie; it would trouble me all my life if I refused — for her sake."

"Come along, then, let's have it over," said Mrs. Henry grimly. "You don't have to fix up."

As the two women entered, Cousin Nellie some steps in advance, the man was still standing. As usual he was immaculately dressed, and on his left coat-sleeve was an unusually wide band of crêpe. He held his hat and stick and when he bowed to Mrs. Henry, made no effort to shake hands.

Raising his head, he looked full at Ariadne. His face, already pale, became ghastly. His lips quivered until he bit them fiercely; but recovering himself in a moment he gave her, too, the same distant, deferential bow.

"Will you be seated?" said Mrs. Henry stiffly, motioning him to a chair. He took it, laying his hat and gloves on a table near. Mrs. Henry drew Ariadne down beside her to a sofa, then looked across at their visitor.

"My young cousin thought it best that I should be with her during the interview you urged," she said in a cold, discouraging tone.

The man did not resent it. "Since, then, my visit must be not only ceremonial, but brief, I shall come to the point at once."

"I think it wise," observed Mrs. Henry.

"It is then what so worldly a lady as yourself may have suspected: to throw myself upon Miss Skipwith's mercy — to let her know in what a serious, in fact desperate entanglement, I find myself."

"To put it in plain English, you've come to beg Miss Skipwith for money."

For the first time the man winced. His long lashes fell in order to hide the venomous light in his eyes.

"Only partially. You, who know Miss Skipwith so much less intimately than I do, have not yet realized, perhaps, that her standards are not the usual ones of self-interest and greed."

"You are giving further reasons why she should be protected," said Mrs. Henry, bridling under the subtle insults.

Her indignation gave Martel a deeper self-confidence.

"In the affair to which I refer," he went on, more softly than before, "the money is not my greatest need. I have enemies, bitter enemies, who will not hesitate to drag into a legal attack the good name of the wife who has just been taken from me. It is upon Ariadne's knowledge of my wife's utter devotion that I rely —"

"I am a lawyer's wife, and I may as well tell you flatly and frankly that what you are now proposing is blackmail — nothing more or less."

"I am certain that to Miss Skipwith it will not appear in so harsh a light. She has known something of my

financial disasters, and my appeal for assistance is made to her alone. Being independent now, and in sole possession of her father's large fortune, she can act entirely for herself, without the need of restraint or even advice from officious relatives."

Mrs. Henry bounced upon the sofa. Before she could utter the sharp words rising to her lips, Ariadne had put out her hands for silence.

"Let me speak, please. I think you ought to know, Mr. Martel, that Judge Henry has thought it best to tell me of your troubles and of this lawsuit that has been brought against you."

"Thank God for it!" cried the man in more normal tones than he had yet used; "then you know, too, that I thought myself a free man when I married Donna — and it has been the continued persecution of the past few years that has made me at times like a madman. I beg you to believe, Ariadne, that the worst I've done has been under the pressure of this horrible fear. I couldn't tell your stepmother. All along I have hoped to win against this — my former wife — who has been hounding me. But she won her case. She makes not only civil but criminal charges against me. She is the kind of woman who will stop at nothing. Why, she is in this very city, with her sleuth hounds always at my heels. They probably know where I am this instant. My last hope on earth lies in your generosity. If I cannot find the money before night, she will take my pound of flesh — and the blood with it. She will — oh, God! — she will do anything. She is merciless and has the power."

Ariadne was shivering under the torrent of his passionate words. Here, for the first time perhaps, she had seen the man's cringing heart laid bare: but Mrs. Henry,

after the first hurled sentences, had begun to steel herself. Her voice was cold, and her eyes were colder, as she said to him :

"You have lived on this girl's young life for seven evil years. Now you come cringing and whining to her feet for more money. It is incredible that even a thing like you can do it."

"I tell you it's not the money only," cried the desperate man. "That woman can send me to hell. If she does, the papers will print the whole horrible story. All England and America will know that I continued to live with Donna when I knew she was not legally my wife. What will old-fashioned Virginians think when they hear Ariadne has been intimately associated in it?"

"You needn't try to frighten Miss Skipwith, nor to desecrate a dead woman, Mr. Patredis. As long as Judge Henry and I have life in our bodies, Ariadne shall not give you money."

The man got to his feet. "Ariadne is a free agent. You can't stop her if she chooses to save me from worse than death and to protect her stepmother's good name; and she will choose — I know her."

"I am not frightened, Cousin Nellie. What may be said of me is nothing. My life is over — as far as any possible happiness is concerned. You know what I feel toward Mr. — Mr. Martel."

"Yes — yes — and he deserves it all," put in the man passionately, "only help me now, Ariadne. I'll pay back the money. I'll never cross your path again."

"But I can't help feeling," went on the girl tremulously, speaking more to Cousin Nellie and herself than to him, "that money — just dead money — means so little before a living horror like this."

"Oh, yes, Ariadne, that is the true thing," the man cried, throwing himself at the girl's feet.

Mrs. Henry rose with an exclamation of anger, catching at the girl's arm.

"Come away from this, Ariadne. I'm not going to stand by and see you robbed. He will only get what he deserves."

"Ariadne — Ariadne — because you are pure and good — My God! Have mercy —" the man prayed.

Ariadne did not rise. For once the man's nearness did not repel her. The terror and despair of this abject soul seemed to have cleansed it. She looked straight before her — over the bowed head.

"Good heavens! There's somebody at the door," exclaimed Mrs. Henry, breaking the oppressive silence. "Get up from there, Patredis. If it's the Judge, he'll throttle you."

Before the man could rise, the door was flung back, and a gay voice cried: "Just as I thought! My little Pat is here on his knees before the heiress."

Then, throwing her handsome head backward, she said to some one just outside the door: "You needn't come in, Mitchell. There are ladies here. Just wait downstairs for us."

Mrs. Henry had sunk again to the sofa and now seized Ariadne's left hand in both her own. The man, staggering backward, fell into the chair he had vacated.

Mrs. Patredis, with all sails spread, swam to the center of the room, and looked with interest and good-nature from one to another of the speechless group. Her eyes finally rested on Ariadne.

"So this is the little stepdaughter that Patredis and his second wife were living on!" She laughed. "Well,

my dear, it is all over now, and I guess you've put on black to keep from looking too happy."

It needed no prod from Cousin Nellie to get the girl to her feet. She rose quickly, her chin up, her white throat gleaming like freshly carved ivory against the black folds encircling it and her eyes level, contemptuous, incredible of such an existence as the one just thrust upon her, were fixed on the bold, black, sparkling ones of Patredis' wife.

"Hold on just a minute," said that person. "I know I'm not your sort, but I've come to do you a good turn."

But Mrs. Henry stepped between them, like a stately if much ruffled hen shielding an only chick. "Miss Skipwith does not desire to be served; kindly let us pass."

"Oh, you're another of them Virginia aristocrats," remarked Mrs. Patredis, still utterly impervious to insult. "They haven't been much in my line up to date, but at least I can tell one when I see it. That's more than Pat can. He'd a got along all right, if he hadn't thought everybody was of his own stripe. Now don't hurry off. We're going to have a little circus right here. I want you to see how prettily Pat eats out of my hand. Come here, Patty."

The beaten wretch, crouching back in his chair, threw her a look of hatred, but did not move.

"This is intolerable," said Cousin Nellie, her fine, mobile nostrils quivering with rage. "Let me pass this instant!"

Mrs. Patredis put out a very substantial-looking arm.

"Now don't make a scene, lady. There's a detective down-stairs, and a whole bunch of Bobbys at the corner of the street. Just let me have my say, and then I'll hike with little Pat yonder at the end of a string. Really Miss Skipwith shouldn't miss it."

"Go — for God's sake, go," groaned the man from his corner.

The newcomer deliberately went over to the door, locked it, and came back smiling, with the key in her hand. For a moment it seemed as if the man would spring upon her, but one long, half humorous look was enough to make him cower, hiding his face in his hands. The woman went close, looking down at him, and when she spoke, her voice was almost caressing. "Pretty little Pat, so bold, so blustering, so smooth when he is master. Look at him now, just because somebody who really knows him has come." Suddenly she dropped her bantering tone and looked at Ariadne. "He was after money, of course. Did you let him have it?"

Before Ariadne could answer, Mrs. Henry said quickly: "She did not."

"It was to pay me off, you know," said Mrs. Patredis. "So you'll make me a present of him, rather than buy his freedom?"

"My cousin can have no interest or concern either in you or your accomplice," said Mrs. Henry. "And if you don't unlock that door this minute, I'll ring the bell and have the porters break it open. We are not accustomed to breathe the air with criminals."

"Keep on your shirt, old lady," said Mrs. Patredis, "I've got to think." She lowered her eyes and seemed lost in reverie.

Mrs. Henry gasped. The coolness of the woman's insolence made her doubt her own senses. Ariadne went forward a few steps, but her cousin caught her back fiercely.

Mrs. Patredis had not turned her head, and now, still in thought, she murmured: "Yes, I understand, the girl refuses to cough up the whole lump — but I'm not certain that I want it."

"Ariadne — for God's sake — save me from this devil," almost screamed the man, in the voice of an animal in its last torture.

"I can't stand it any longer, Cousin Nellie," whispered the girl; "it's too hideous. Let him have the money."

"No," said Mrs. Henry, "I think he's getting his punishment."

At her husband's last words, the woman had turned a slow look upon him. He was quivering like a cold and hungry dog. He felt her gaze and fought to keep his eyes from answering hers, but the hypnotic influence grew. Slowly he raised a twitching face, gray-green with a grease of sweat upon it, and his shrinking, terrified look met hers. She had him as tangibly in her power as though handcuffs had already clicked. All the lightness and humor of her face had fled. She was personified Fate, implacable, relentless, and triumphant.

Still holding him, she said with terrible composure: "That was a bad move, Pat, a damn fool thing to say, and you know it. We won't take Miss Skipwith's money. I don't want it. I prefer my little Pat."

"Blanche, Blanche," he said through chattering teeth, "I didn't mean it,"

"Oh, it's 'Blanche, Blanche' now," she sneered, "but it's come too late. You always do say just a spill or two over the limit. Do you remember when that judge was summing up your case in 'Frisco?"

But the cornered rat was to show his teeth at last. He sprang toward her screaming: "Be still, you fiend. Let that rest, or I'll — I'll —"

His face was like a maniac's; he looked round the room as if for weapons.

Mrs. Henry gave a cry of fear and drew Ariadne to the shelter of her arms.



The one person unmoved was Mrs. Patredis. "Or you'll do what?" she asked in a cool, level voice. "You'll do exactly as you always do when you're up against me, Constantine Patredis. You'll go right back to your little corner and sit down. But you needn't sit this time. I've had about enough. Go pick up your pretty shining hat and your cane and come along with me."

"I won't come with you," he muttered fiercely. "Go back to your lawyers and detectives; we'll fight it out through them."

"Oh, no, we won't. It's time I took a hand in your affairs myself."

"You cannot force me to follow you," he chattered. Even Mrs. Henry turned her eyes from the appalling physical and moral anguish that quivered in his face. The upper lip, under its small, dark mustache, lay back along his teeth like that of an infuriated wolf.

"Don't look — don't look at them, Ariadne," she whispered, pressing the girl's face against her breast.

Mrs. Patredis' eyes had narrowed. "I can't force you to follow me!" she repeated slowly. "We'll see about that. Come!"

She went to the door, unlocking it. The thing that was meant to be a man shambled after her. The two shuddering women with closed eyes heard the dragging of his steps and the gasping breath of baffled, impotent rage.

Just before she opened the door, Mrs. Patredis surveyed the figures of the two gentlewomen. Something in Mrs. Henry's averted face — a dignity and nobility of bearing that no contamination could have power to touch — the impossible spiritual gulf which divided such as these from her — brought a dull throb of anger to her heart. Because of it, her last words were a jibe.

"I hope me and my little Pat hasn't kept you from Buckingham Palace, or Fullers, or any of them places where you good Americans go." Another fierce "Come!" to Patredis, and they were gone.

For a few moments the two women remained standing, clinging dumbly to one another. Then Mrs. Henry took down her arm and going to each window in turn, threw the sash as wide as it would go. Then she pushed an electric bell. When the servant came, she commanded: "Go across the street to that little drug-store and buy me a bottle of chloride of lime."

"Very good, Madam."

"And I'd like another disinfectant, too, the kind you use with an atomizer. Charge them up to our room." As the man turned, she added: "Send my chambermaid to me." It was not till after the maid had entered and been told to prepare a hot bath that Mrs. Henry spoke to her young cousin.

"I suppose the maid will think I'm out of my senses. I've had one bath already, but I must have another and change my clothes to the skin before I can begin to feel decent."

"I know," said the girl wearily. "I've felt that way too. I think I'll go to my room."

As she was leaving, Mrs. Henry came up to her, took her by the shoulders, and looked long into the pale young face.

"And you've lived near a thing like that for seven years!" she said slowly.

Ariadne pushed back the hair from her forehead. Her words, which seemed at the moment irrelevant, came from the same bitter spring of thought.

"Now I can say truly that I am glad Donna is dead."

## CHAPTER IV

AT luncheon Judge Henry announced his success in securing a passage on the *Regina* — “the latest and most luxurious steamer in the world sailing between Southampton and New York.”

“I’m extremely glad we can return so soon,” he remarked, looking kindly at Ariadne, “for the sooner we get our little girl away from these unpleasant associations, the better it is going to be for her. There is to be no longer a Naxos for Ariadne of Allan Water; she is come into her own again.”

“Unpleasant associations! Humph!” said Cousin Nellie, with such emphasis that the Judge looked startled, and Ariadne gave a warning glance across the table. It had been agreed between the cousins that no mention should be made just yet of their loathsome experience with the Patredises. Mrs. Henry knew her husband well, and she actually feared to let him know, while the evil-doers were still close at hand, the full indignity which she and Ariadne had suffered. Behind his quiet eyes lurked still a smoldering fire of youth and impetuosity; any affront to herself would have been a handful of straw upon the coals. It was not impossible that he would have started out at once in search of Patredis, intent upon personal chastisement.

So now, at Ariadne’s look, Mrs. Henry hurriedly corrected herself and said cheerily: “So the tickets are bought! That means in two days we start for home.”

Dick Carter, who had been quiet for a few moments, being engrossed in chasing stiffly fried whitebait round an unnecessarily large plate, suddenly dropped his fork and looked up. The meaning of his mother's words had just reached him. "Goin' home?" he repeated, incredulous with joy. His mother smiled and nodded. "Goody goody gout, my shirt-tail's out!" sang the child at the top of his voice.

The prim English folk, seated at tables around them, turned with an air of shock and astonishment. Several ladies raised their lorgnons. A red-faced gentleman choked over his mug of ale. There were one or two wintry gleams of amusement, but for the most part the other guests looked as if they were in personal danger. The two chief waiters rushed together for a whispered conference. One of the hotel proprietors came to the door, gazing at the Henry table blankly.

Mrs. Henry was red with mortification. Even Ariadne flushed. "Dick Kyarter," said the mother, "what on earth has possessed you? Leave the table at once." Dick had squirmed down on his chair until only the small, shamed face appeared above the whitebait.

"I didn't mean nothin', Muddie," he whined. "It jest come out."

Mrs. Henry was not placated. "I knew you'd disgrace us yet," she fumed; "just see how the people are staring at you. Leave the table."

Dick Carter hung one hip over the side of the chair and put a fat-ribbed stocking further. In doing so he glanced imploringly at his father. Judge Henry tried, too late, to check the twitching at the corner of his lips. Dick regained self-confidence in an instant.

"If you make me go now, Muddie, I'm sure to fall off the front gallery and break my neck," he argued.

"Judge Henry, were you laughing at him?" the lady now demanded, turning her full ire upon her lord. "And Ariadne — positively chuckling! How can any one expect me to manage an imp like that if he sees you others laughing?"

"Never mind, Cousin Nellie," said the girl. "He won't do it again. Please let him stay."

Mrs. Henry felt it incumbent upon her maternal dignity to keep her gaze sternly fixed a little longer upon the culprit. But Dick knew well when hidden rocks were passed. He had again drawn himself upright, secure in his father's favor, and renewed his interest in his luncheon.

"We don't ever eat minnows at home, do we, father?" he inquired blandly, picking up a rather fat whitebait by the tail and holding it critically against the light. "Gee!" he exclaimed, "this one's full of insides. Have I been eatin' insides, Muddie?"

"Take it away from him. Take it away quick," Mrs. Henry said in a low, agonized voice to her husband. She leaned back in pretended exhaustion.

When her peace of mind was somewhat restored, she said to her husband: "I want to take Ariadne shopping this afternoon. How much money can you let us have?"

"Nearly any amount you wish, my dear; you know I had to cable for more."

"Yes, I remember," said his wife hurriedly. She did not want Ariadne's mind to go back to the necessity of the cabling. "Well, I want a good deal. About five hundred dollars, at the least. We've so much to buy."

Ariadne looked astonished. "Why, Cousin Nellie, how can you want so much in this short time? I don't need anything."

"Yes, you do," said the other. "I was just about to

tell you of it before luncheon, when we were — interrupted,” again the knowing look passed. “Now before I go back to it, I want to arrange about Dick Kyarter. You’ll have to take charge of him, Judge Henry.”

“I — to take entire charge?” said the Judge, with an apprehensive glance toward his son.

“I want to go shoppin’ with you and Cousin Ariadne,” said Dick, “I want to buy a billy-goat.”

“We are not going to a sale of billy-goats,” said Mrs. Henry. Her face brightened. “I know the very thing. Take him to the Zoölogical Gardens. They have a fine one here. Maybe you can get an empty monkey-cage and bribe the keeper to lock him in until the time of sailing.” Again Dickie’s side glance went to his father.

“Shucks!” he swaggered, very emboldened by what he saw. “Muddie wouldn’t let me stay in a monkey-cage. She’d be scared the people would give me too many peanuts.”

“I feel that the Zoölogical Gardens are peculiarly appropriate,” said the Judge. “Well, my boy, as soon as we’ve visited the bank for these ladies, we will take an omnibus to the Zoo, and give them a long afternoon for shopping.”

“But I don’t understand, Cousin Nellie,” said the girl, still a little puzzled. “You had all sorts of things sent here to the hotel for me: a black traveling coat, and a hat, and everything —”

“Listen to me, Ariadne,” said Mrs. Henry, leaning her plump elbows on the table. “Do you realize that you are no longer a wandering Jew but an American heiress? You are Ariadne of Allan Water, and, as the Judge says, are coming into your own.”

“No, I hadn’t thought of it that way,” admitted the girl.

"You don't realize, either, I suppose, that a cable has been sent your grandmother, and that by now our special part of Virginia is in one twitter of expectancy over your coming."

"I didn't realize," said the girl, clasping her hands together. Cousin Nellie nodded, well-pleased at the effect she was beginning to produce. Judge Henry watched Ariadne's face lovingly.

"Well, they are! From Mr. Crane at the station to Uncle Peter and Mammy in the kitchen porch at Allan Water, they are all thinking and talking about little else. Life slips by pretty fast in Virginia. The change of seasons, with now and then the funeral of an old inhabitant, makes up their greatest excitement."

Ariadne's lips trembled in a smile. The words brought the old, quiet life back so plainly.

"To them you will be a romantic heroine, a sort of fairy princess. If you had left Allan Water in a star-spangled balloon, going straight up, and wandering around among the planets for these seven years, you could not be a more remarkable figure."

"I don't see how it can," said the girl. "It all seems so dull and uneventful to me." The color and life in her young face were deepening steadily.

"Well, that's just how it is, I know," said Cousin Nellie with decision.

"She is exactly right, my dear," added Judge Henry. "This home-coming of yours will be the greatest event for years."

"Now to the shopping!" Mrs. Henry went on. "Did you ever hear of an exiled princess returning in triumph to her home with empty hands? Certainly not; she brings rich perfumes, rolls of silk, and strange

jewels from the Orient. In other words," Mrs. Henry broke off, laughing her deep "peach" laugh at the bewilderment in the girl's face — "in other and more suitable words, my dear, every living soul within a radius of twenty miles of Allan Water must have some present, some token of remembrance from the Princess' own lily-white hands. It would break their hearts if you took nothing. It doesn't matter what you take — from a two-penny trinket to a motor-car — it is the thought they value. They are made that way!"

Ariadne's eyes were now like stars. The lovely, shifting pink was in her cheeks. "Oh, Cousin Nellie, I see. How good you are and how thoughtful. I don't believe it ever would have occurred to me, by myself. Oh, it will be lovely to pick out things for them. Can we have heaps of money, Cousin Judge?" She turned to him, eager and sparkling.

"As you are now sole heiress to nearly one million dollars with an income of over fifty thousand a year, you can safely allow yourself to be extravagant," laughed the Judge.

"I'm going to buy everybody something beautiful. I think I'll begin with Dick Carter. Oh, Dicky — did you hear what heaps and heaps of money your cousin Ariadne has? It sounds ridiculous for it to be me. What do you want, Dicky? Say anything!"

She was a child herself, leaning down to the boy's upturned face.

"Gee — can I have anything?" cried Dick Carter. He frowned, in that absurd replica of Randolph's darker look. Something caught at the girl's heart, but she thrust it back.

"Anything, Dicky. I'll buy that first."

"If I can't get a billy-goat —" he mused, "oh, I know!"



I want a balloon, a big balloon — with star spangles — like the one Muddie says took you up.”

Ariadne threw a distressed look at the Judge. “Star-spangled things are made only in America, my boy,” he said, helping her out. “We’ll look about New York for one.”

“How would you like a watch, Dicky? A real watch with a pretty chain?” the girl queried.

Dicky’s young face was dubious.

“If you had a watch, you could keep up with all those funny bells on the steamer, and see if they were right,” put in the mother insidiously.

“Me for the watch!” exclaimed Dicky, to the relief of all. “An’ I want a long chain with a whistle on it — so I can blow as many whistles as they have bells.”

This important point being settled, Ariadne turned again to Cousin Nellie.

“And what for my precious, precious Grandma?”

“Have you ever passed by that marvelous shop called Liberty’s?”

Ariadne shook her head.

“No woman passes by,” said the Judge in pretended gloom. “Nellie dragged me into it yesterday. Liberty is a misnomer — at least where tractable husbands are concerned.”

“He said that yesterday. He thought it very witty, so he says it again,” remarked Mrs. Henry with scorn. “My remark was, give me Liberty’s and give me debt. The whole big shop is like a shattered rainbow. Such scarfs, and ribbons, and lengths of shining gauze. They have wonderful, crinkly head-things that seem knitted out of spider-webs and dew. I can just see one of them on that lovely white hair of Cousin Belinda’s; and they have tea-cozies, so exquisite that my only fear is for per-

fumed tea. And little velvet footstools, made for Virginia — and slippers — and wadded lounging robes — and beaded reticules and —”

“You’ve said enough, my dear,” laughed the Judge, “Ariadne is thoroughly inoculated. Come, Dick Carter, let’s hasten to the bank for funds. I’ll get five hundred for each of you.”

Later, as the two women sat together in a speeding taxicab, the elder woman said in a very thoughtful tone: “Do you know, my dear, I’ve just been wondering whether I am really a very dull, unemotional sort of person, or whether that dreadful scene this morning was in itself so extreme — so — so outside, as it were, to experiences that generally come into decent people’s lives — that there is nothing in me to retain it. Of course this is a feeble way of expressing myself, but already it feels to me like a nightmare that has gone forever.”

The girl sighed. “I’m afraid it’s more real to me than that. You see I have known that terrible man so long.”

“Well, it will pass. It simply has got to,” said Mrs. Henry in her decided way. “Why, in less than a month it will be no more than some terrible scene in a low theater to which you were dragged. Such things are out of your life forever — and thank God for it! Everything is before you, dear child, riches, health, youth, and — well, you remember what your Cousin Nellie once said to you in the old phaëton at home.” With a charming, loving tenderness, she again put her hand under the girl’s chin and turned the drooping face upward. Ariadne met her eyes fairly, and the answering smile was exquisitely sweet; but Cousin Nellie’s heart was aching just a little for what she saw was no longer the face of a child but that of a woman who had suffered. She took her hand away.

"You've got all the gifts of life," she cried, as if in defiance of the fate which had wrought the subtle change. "There are to be no more shadows — only sunshine and great happiness."

"I can never be really happy, Cousin Nellie, not in the way you mean. The nearest to it will be getting home again."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the elder woman. "You've got to be happy. I'll see to it that you are. Well, this is our shop. Did you ever see such windows? Yesterday they were all pink; and to-day they are filled up with strips of London mist, with lilacs and streaks of sunlight showing through. Stop a minute. Let me pay off the driver and let the taxi go. It makes me nervous to think of him sitting outside here, waiting, while the infernal machine by him spits out good American dimes. No, don't wait," she said to the ingratiating chauffeur.

Ariadne found that her cousin had not exaggerated. A very lust of purchase overtook her. "I'm getting positively excited with it," she said once, laughingly, as she had just given the order for four exquisite, quilted sofa-pillows in shades of mauve and purple. "You know I have never had money to spend. Donna didn't always think of it and I hated to ask."

Ariadne was still laughing. Not a trace of resentment showed in her voice, but Cousin Nellie had to turn away to keep the bitter comment back. Instead she said cheerfully: "Now for Mrs. Crane. She still has neuralgia when she needs it. I'm sure this magenta scarf will give her such rapture that she will probably insist on being buried in it."

"Yes, yes," agreed the girl. "But why can't I get her a dress, too — one of those neat, black silks already made up."

"Neat ! Black !" sniffed Cousin Nellie. "You must have forgotten Mrs. Crane. Anything darker than pea-green would be an insult."

"Then lets get that iridescent purple with the gold tones in it ; and are those spangles on the waist ?"

"That's her style exactly. Think of the harmony between that and the magenta scarf !"

Mr. Crane presented graver difficulties. A yellow waistcoat and a number of gaudy ties were chosen, but Ariadne declared these not enough. "I want to take him a real present and put it into his hands myself when I get off the train."

They finally decided that a compact smoker's outfit would be the thing. "Though really, in my heart, I believe he would prefer a mechanical toy," said Mrs. Henry.

"What a pity that they haven't lots and lots of children," sighed Ariadne. "Then I could take them all mechanical toys."

"It strikes me you're doing pretty well as it is," said Cousin Nellie dryly. "You have already filled about two trunks that you haven't got. We'll stop somewhere just at the last and buy them."

Reluctantly they turned their backs on Liberty's.

"We won't take another taxi," said Mrs. Henry. "It will do us good to walk a little. Besides, we can look in the store windows and see if there's anything we want."

"I seem to want everything I see," laughed the girl. Suddenly she paused. They had come to a florist's where, among the tall flower-holders filled with roses, orchids, iris, and spikes of many colored gladiolus, lay a great cross made of lilies. To Ariadne, not knowing it to be an ordinary English custom, the waiting offering on its

somber velvet background seemed a personal reminder of a tribute unfulfilled. Without speaking to her companion, she went into the shop.

Mrs. Henry remained outside. She did not need to ask the meaning of the girl's errand. When she returned, after a few brief directions to the florist, and the exchange not only of bank-notes but of the florist's address, her face was graver but very, very sweet. Mrs. Henry made no comment, and the two walked on together in search of Mr. Crane's meerschaum pipe and its silver-mounted accessories.

It was one of those days in London when the prevalent "crépuscule" effects, beloved of French artists, had vanished utterly. The lowering gray sky had rolled back like a tent, showing high, arched blue and the heaped up white of clouds. The sun shone down on a multi-colored crowd. Regent Street, in spite of its generous width, was packed close with slow-moving vehicles, chiefly taxicabs, in which gayly dressed women or sometimes a bored youth lolled. It chanced to be "Alexandra Day," and hundreds of young girls all in white were selling wild roses.

Finally the smoking outfit was secured. Cousin Nellie, looking at her watch, said she was ready for some tea. "And here's a place that looks very British. I like English things in England."

They took their places at a small marble table. A waitress hurried up smiling. "Two teas?" she inquired.

"Yes, tea for two," said Mrs. Henry.

"And what with it, Madam? Tea-kyke? Buttered toast — scones — bans — bread and butter — or plyne kyke?"

"Tea-cakes," said Mrs. Henry, grasping at the first. The maid hurried off.

"I don't suppose we can eat sweet stuff this early in the evening," she continued, "but I had to say something to stop that torrent in a foreign tongue."

With the tea came two plates, on each of which reposed what looked like the half of an enormous yeast-powder biscuit, the surface toasted slightly, and heavily buttered.

Mrs. Henry gave a covert but inquiring glance across the table. When the maid left, she said: "So this is tea-cake. Not a grain of sugar in it and big enough to feed an alligator. I wonder what Dick Kyarter would remark if he were here?"

"It's just as well he isn't!" laughed Ariadne.

"They are very good, no matter what the English call them," said Mrs. Henry, as she finished. "Now, we must renew our attack upon those presents. I think we'd better get Anguish a couple of real bell-boy suits, green with rows of gold buttons. Fancy his pride! Dick Kyarter has been tormenting my life out of me for one. I caught him trying on the Morley bell-boy's jacket. Then some good, serviceable things for the elder servants —"

"Yes, but something pretty, too, something not useful," said Ariadne.

"My child," said Cousin Nellie with mock severity, "you are young to have found out the immoral truth that gifts, in proportion to their uselessness, are most highly prized."

Ariadne laughed. "Then I think Mammy would adore a long-handled fancy lorgnon, and yes, Cousin Nellie, I am going to buy Uncle Peter an opera-hat. Don't you know, the kind that collapse and snap back into shape. He would love to wear it on Sunday and show it off at church."

The rest of the shopping was comparatively simple, consisting chiefly in the purchase of various English "traveling boxes."

"The great thing is to make sure our trunks are delivered," said the practical matron; "you won't have time for real packing. You had better just pile bundles in as they come. The bills will be with them, and we'll go through those wretched, American customs without any trouble."

"What are customs?" asked the girl innocently.

"You poor, benighted child!" said Cousin Nellie, staring. "Don't you know anything about your own land? Customs are a tax you pay for being honest — or rather, for being afraid of getting caught."

They returned to the hotel, weary, almost penniless, but radiant with the thought of packages to come. The Judge and Dick Carter had already returned. The boy had been good, unusually good, his father stated, at which Dick Carter's face took on an expression so entirely seraphic that Mrs. Henry looked sharply at him and declared: "He's probably been a worse terror than usual," as she moved toward the lift. "Ariadne and I are simply ready to drop. Come on, Ariadne. Aren't you dead?"

"I am tired," answered the girl, "but it's such a happy tired. All the way over on the ship I'll do nothing but think about the lovely things we've bought, and the pleasure they will give."

"If you did what a girl of your age and looks ought to do, you'd flirt on that ship from the minute you put your first toe on it till your last heel had scraped the farther deck."

"I'm afraid I'm not that kind of girl," said Ariadne wistfully; "sometimes I wish I were."

## CHAPTER V

THE departure from London was taken very quietly. Mr. and Mrs. Henry had not been there long enough to make new friends, or to notify their few acquaintances of their presence in the big metropolis. Ariadne had no grown-up friends anywhere. All the pleasant little ceremonies of farewell, the gifts of flowers, fruit, and books, were lacking, but since the girl had never known of these, she could not miss them.

The one dramatic incident, if it could be so called, took place on the Morley "porch" at the moment when Dick Carter and young Edgar Rabbit, a bell-boy, were bidden to say their last farewells. Dick's voice, always of a valiant and stentorian quality, was lifted now in lamentations that filled Trafalgar Square. Pedestrians stopped to gaze upward. The tops of passing "busses" showed craning necks and backward turning faces. A wan suffragette, selling papers at the corner, let the portfolio fall; while the tall blue "Bobby" whose beat was near this dangerous, if demure young person, took a few hurried steps toward the scene of woe.

The two boys, clinging to each other, exchanged vows of constant intercourse and undying friendship, together with muttered blasphemies against the parents of each who had combined to work this wrong.

"Never mind, Edgar Rabbit, when I'm grown up I'm comin' back an' git you. I can fight your father, then, an' your mother, an' — an' — everybody." He clinched



his little fists and looked about him fiercely, as if longing then for the deferred battle.

The English lad, more guarded in his grief, dug fists into his reddened eyes, and muttered that "it was a shyme, that's what it was, a shyme!"

The Judge, of all the onlookers, was most plainly affected. He bent over the small Rabbit, whispered his own promise to let Dick come back before very long, and added the more tangible benediction of such a heap of the small "gold shillings" that the boy was dazed.

Dick, borne to the taxi in his father's arms, wept on; but a small boy's tears cannot last very long, especially when two ministering angels are at hand, plying him with offerings and consolation. By the time the great station was reached, his angry little face had cleared, and when Ariadne, her hands full of the clumsy English coppers, took him from one penny-in-the-slot machine to another, letting him take from the mysterious, clicking drawers a weird assortment of toys, matches, chocolates, cakes, preserved fruits, post-cards, and chewing-gum, his bright grin was in its usual place.

On the steamer other child friends were made, and even the most inconsiderate of parents cannot separate affinities on shipboard.

Ariadne, true to her own prevision, kept entirely to herself, and often in her long walks, pausing to stare at the gray, ever-lessening distance toward America, dreamed of her home and longed for the intervening hours to have passed. Many curious and admiring glances were sent after the tall, graceful, young figure as she took these solitary walks. Her deep mourning dress and grave face were in themselves enough to attract

attention, but when it was learned, through the medium of Dick Carter, that the pretty lady was his cousin "named Ariadne — he didn't remember her other name," and that she hadn't been back home for years and years, and that she had more money than anybody else in the whole world! interest naturally deepened. More than one young man began to pay flattering court to Dick, and baffled by his impatience of "grown-ups," made deferential advances to Judge Henry, all to no result.

Meanwhile the uneventful days were slipping past. One morning the Judge, coming back to them from his after-dinner cigar, said to Ariadne: "Well, my dear, this is our last day on board. The Captain tells me by five o'clock we are to see what, to my mind, at least, is the most stupendous monument of man's energy and power in all the world. I refer to the approach to New York from the sea."

"I suppose it has changed a great deal since Ariadne left it," remarked Cousin Nellie.

"And I don't remember it," said the girl. "I think we sailed in a Boston steamer, but I'm not quite sure."

"Passengers who are constantly crossing tell me that it changes from month to month," put in the Judge. "Each new sky-scraper, as it goes up, causes a storm of protestation for fear that the sky-line will be injured. But when the new Titan has taken his final place, and his head and shoulders, however ugly, square themselves against eternity — so to speak — the granite fortress of the city is found to have gained an added dignity."

Ariadne slipped her arm into his.

"Take me for a little walk along the deck, Cousin Judge," she begged.

The light in the fine old eyes had warmed and touched her. She longed to say to him how beautiful it must be to have these thoughts, this broad, humble consciousness of human life, but she couldn't find words that seemed fitting for such tribute. Cousin Nellie had settled back in her chair. She was smiling, her eyes bright and tender.

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear," said the old Virginian, offering his arm to Ariadne. He would have been astonished and entirely overcome could he have seen just then into the heart of his companion.

"I want you to be with me, Cousin Judge, when the very first glimpse of New York can be seen. You and Cousin Nellie, too. Will you?" asked the girl, after a few moments of silent walking.

"I should consider it a privilege," he answered.

"Oh, Cousin Judge," she said impulsively, after another little pause.

"Yes — dear child?"

"Why is it that when men can do such wonderful things — when they can pile up such a city, and paint pictures that almost breathe, and write music that your soul gets drowned in — why should one person, even a perfectly unimportant person like me, feel, sometimes, as if they were the real center of it, as if — Oh, I don't know how to tell you, but sometimes it just catches me here," she put her hand against her heart. "It almost burns me with that queer sense of being the center of it all, as if it were here for me — and nothing matters quite so much as for this little singing, ridiculous spark of me to think and to feel things and to try to be happy?"

"Dear little girl," said the man tenderly, "you touch the very heart-spring of life's mystery in such wondering. No one can answer you. You yourself never can

find the answer. It is the great integral 'why.' It runs in the sap of young trees and in the beating of a bird's heart, no less than in the human spirit. Philosophers have tried for centuries to give us a reply. For my own part," here he lowered his voice reverently, "I believe it to be the one universal yearning of His creatures for the Divine Source of all."

"You have helped me more than anybody I ever knew," said the girl in a broken whisper. "You helped me there in London. I must always be just a little stronger and more able to bear things because you are my friend; and you believe in me."

"I am, indeed, your very devoted friend," said the Judge, patting the little hand on his arm, "but these are somber thoughts for a lassie under a sky like this. Come, we will go back to Cousin Nellie. I defy speculation to flourish near that fountain of sunlit common sense. Ah, my dear, there's a woman for you — the best and dearest in the world; but had you whispered your eternal 'why' to her, she would have made you first show your tongue and then take a dose of calomel."

At four o'clock that afternoon the first sign of land appeared, and with it the first misty hint of the great city. Judge Henry had carried his companions to the prow of the ship. He was positively excited.

"We are going to see it first with a touch of the evening mist, and then in the glory of sunset," he exclaimed. "Nothing could be more perfect."

"I don't believe I'm looking at it now," said Cousin Nellie, as the great spires and domes and lower rectangles grew into shape. "I feel that like the old Maine farmer, who saw his first camel, 'There ain't no such animal!' Well, I wonder what old London's got to show beside this!"

"It is, indeed, overpowering," murmured Judge Henry. "I find myself humbled, — dazed before it, — not so much at sight of the material achievement, as in realizing the power and the glory of man's creative mind.

" 'For out of Thought's interior sphere,' "

he began to quote, in a low, reverent voice,

" 'These wonders rose to upper air ;  
And Nature gladly gave them place,  
Adopted them into her race  
And granted them an equal date  
With Andes and with Ararat.' "

Ariadne could not speak. She held her cousin's arm tightly, staring out with her soul in her young eyes, thinking of the things he had said.

"Of course we've seen it from Staten Island and the New Jersey ferries," went on Mrs. Henry, "but somehow it is entirely different, coming on it like this from the big ocean."

"How white it looks — how strangely unsubstantial !" said Ariadne.

"It will grow more so, as the gold behind it deepens into sunset," answered the Judge.

"I wonder if those building magicians will ever manage to rise higher into upper air," speculated Cousin Nellie. "Look at the Aquarium — like a big, low toadstool at the very end. And the immense block of the emigrant building. Do you see that tall one with two square tops, Ariadne?" she cried, catching the girl's other arm. "There, there, a little to the right of the Woolworth tower," she pointed.

"With sort of little gnome caps on it?" asked Ariadne, sharing her eagerness.

“Yes, that’s the one. Well, in a floor there, quite far up — there are thirty floors, I believe — Randolph Carr has his office.”

“Has he?” the girl managed to reply quite naturally. Then her eyes closed for an instant. The tall buildings were reeling. When she looked again, it seemed to her as if the airy battlements must have crumbled. The one name, shattering through nerves already tense with excitement, might have struck through like a sword the phantom structures of the outer world. She took her hand from the Judge’s arm and leaned forward heavily upon the rail.

As from a great distance came Mrs. Henry’s brisk voice, saying to her husband: “I’ll have to run down to my cabin for a minute. I haven’t tipped the stewardess yet.”

“I must go too; will you come, Ariadne?”

“No — leave me here, please. I want to look at Ararat a little longer.”

When they had gone she threw back her head, breathing deeply. She deliberately looked again toward the nearing towers, where probably at this very moment Randy Carr bent his rough, bronze head over a lawyer’s desk. Now, out of the whole of this incredible city, this building alone was real. Randy, the man whom she had thought her true lover, the one man in the world she could have loved, was sitting at his desk engrossed in things which she would never know — ignorant of her nearness and, should he dream it, indifferent and unconcerned.

“I will not tremble this way, just to think of him,” she told herself fiercely. “He was ungenerous and unjust. He never really cared. I still have home to love and the dear people waiting for me. I will not

stop in New York a single day. The one thing I could not bear would be seeing him again!"

She turned and hurried down to find Mrs. Henry.

"Are you going right down home the minute we land?" she demanded of that astonished lady.

"Good gracious child, how you scared me! Certainly not. We won't get all our trunks to the hotel by morning."

"Couldn't Cousin Judge check mine right through from the wharf to Virginia and let me go on alone? I've got several handbags, and Mr. Crane's pipe is in one of them."

"You take my breath away, child. There's your cousin Judge now. You'd better ask him."

It was finally arranged that Ariadne was to secure what luggage she could and start by an early morning train for the South. Judge Henry had business which would keep him in New York for several days, and Mrs. Henry did not wish to leave him.

"I think it is somehow more appropriate for you to make your entry into Allan Water alone," admitted that lady. "All the same," she added, with a look of puzzled inquiry that made the girl flush, "since you've taken seven years to get there, I can't see why a day or two more makes such a lot of difference."

"It may be silly, Cousin Nellie, but I assure you that I must get home. I can't wait. I don't want to be in New York an hour longer than I have to. Please be good to me and help me go."

"All right, honey, if you feel that way about it," said the older woman, smiling. But deeper than the light words was the thought: "All this flurry and excitement came on you after I mentioned Randy Carr. Now I wonder —"

"It's Virginia, it's Virginia," sang the girl's heart the next morning, as she opened her eyes to dew-sparkling fields and great, solemn groves of trees. For Cousin Nellie had been better than her words, and the girl had secured a drawing-room on the midnight express to Washington. From there it was a comparatively short trip to the Allan Water station.

"It is already Virginia," she told herself over and over again. "That is Virginia grass springing from the blessed red earth, and these cedar trees have roots deep in the soil I love. Oh, when I get there, I shall be like Ulysses at Ithaca. I shall kiss the earth and lift handfuls to my face. I don't believe even mud will stop me."

She dressed quickly, stooping down again and again to peer from the windows still shaded by the upper berth, and thrilled to familiar names and landmarks. She repacked her main dressing-bag and laid Mr. Crane's imposing leather case upon it. "I suppose I had better eat breakfast; I shall need it," she said aloud, and then: "Oh, maybe I can get some real hominy!"

As her own station neared, she felt her hands grow cold with excitement. Her young throat filled with something that felt like cotton-wool, but none the less suffocating.

"I know I'm going to embrace Mr. Crane!" she thought and then laughed at her own childishness. She could not be still a moment. A new log cabin by the road, a door crowded with waving pickaninnies, made her want to cry. She waved back vehemently. This being an infrequent recognition, the little darkies rushed out in a body, gesticulating madly and trying to keep up with the train. An old negro, hoeing to-



bacco, stared at the bright face that flashed past him, and paused to wonder why any lady should look so happy to see him. Then he shook his head, spat upon his horny hands, and philosophically returned to his work.

The negro porter hurried up to her, brandishing the inevitable whisk-broom.

"Yo' station next, Miss," he announced.

Ariadne stood up. She longed to enter into conversation with the porter, to tell him that she had been away seven years, and was coming back, as an exile, to paradise, but she only said: "Be sure you get all the bags and see that my steamer trunk is put off." The suppressed inclination found vent in a tip of such magnitude that the porter showed every white tooth in his head and nearly brushed the hem off her skirt in his renewed exertions.

When the train began to slow down, Ariadne thought for a moment she was dying. "I won't be able to walk down the car at this rate," she thought in terror.

"Allan Water," called the conductor.

At that magic sound, she sprang to her feet, everything else forgotten, and in a moment was grasping Mr. Crane's small, freckled hand. As Mrs. Henry had told her, Mr. Crane had scarcely altered by a hair. If there were a few more wrinkles, especially along the neck, Ariadne's excited eyes did not see them. The first glimpse of his brown-suited figure carried her back to childhood. But whatever her own sense of familiarity, the little station agent evidently did not share it. After a momentary contact with her gloved fingers, he backed away, looking up at her with a sort of incredulity.

"Is it reely you, Miss Airey — Miss Skipwith? Seems to me you've growed up a lot."

"Cose it's Miss Airey, you fool," cried a shrill, feminine voice, as a figure in bright green darted forward.

"Who else could it be, an' we on the watch out sense daybreak. Howdy, Miss Airey. It certainly is good to have you home again."

"Oh, Mrs. Crane, I'm so happy to be here. I've brought this little scarf for you. There's a lot of other things in my trunks when they come. And here's the newest kind of a pipe and things to go with it — from London — for Mr. Crane. I brought it in my own hands so I could give it to him right away."

She held it out. Mr. Crane's hands were trembling so that he would have dropped it had not his wife intervened.

"What's the matter with you, anyway, Jasper Crane?" she said severely. "Miss Airey ain't goin' to bite! He's shaking like an ague," she explained to Ariadne, a statement entirely unnecessary, as the little man's baggy knees threatened to give way at any moment.

"Must a' bin that camomile tea she poured down me las' night — so I'd be spry for you this morning, Miss Airey," said the little man, goaded into self-defense. "It didn't work like she said it would. Somehow, when I seed you first step off that car — like a — like a — like a queen, something give way in my innards. I'm all right now. You needn't hold on to that box, Mrs. Crane," he said angrily, to his still officious wife. "I can't tell you how obleeged I am to you fur thinkin' of me, Miss Airey, an' I give you a heartfelt, lovin' welcome back to God's country."

"Well, I'm glad you found your tongue at last," sniffed Mrs. Crane — "standin' there stutterin' and wobblin' like a dressed-up skeer-crow. Thank you for

my shawl, Miss Airey," she said, turning again to the girl; "it's a beauty. I do love them bright colors; seems to keep the neuralgy off a little when I wear them."

"But where is Grandma? Haven't they sent for me?" cried the girl, looking along the station platform. By this time the train was out of sight and hearing. The silence of the woods had fallen upon the little group. The snort of a horse came from the other side of the station building. As Ariadne stepped toward it, from round the corner came a woolly head, the top held sidewise, and this was followed by two rolling eyes and then dazzling rows of teeth. Ariadne gave a start. The visage was indubitably that of Anguish, but what was he doing so high up in the air? The child must be standing on a box!

"Anguish!" she cried aloud to the head. A long, thin arm came out, a crane-like leg, and then the rest of him.

"Yassum, it's me," said Anguish. "An' ole Miss is settin' here in de faytum."

Even the miraculous growth of Anguish had no charms to stay the girl's flying feet.

"Grandma — Grandma!" she said, with a cry that was almost a sob.

"My little Ariadne! God be thanked for sparing me until this day," she heard the old lady whisper, and then for a long, blessed silence she seemed to lose herself in the warm, lavender-scented haven of encircling arms.

For weeks the happiness of being once more at home and the consciousness of being freed forever from the malign influences of the past, kept Ariadne's spirits high. The selection of the presents had been in every case an inspiration. Uncle Peter's joy in his collapsible

opera hat was pathetic. More than once Ariadne, coming out suddenly upon the kitchen porch, had surprised the two old friends, Mammy and her husband — for they had long since reached that Indian summer of a contented marriage — toying with the absurd mechanism and laughing like the children that they were.

Cousin Agnes, at the girl's insistence, had agreed to remain. She and Mrs. Bannister had proved to be unusually congenial. For them the seven years, so long to Ariadne, had passed like so many months reflected in the quiet stream of time. The one stone flung by fate had been the death of the old cat, Doctor Johnson. But even this bereavement had its consolation, for beginning with a few months before his lamented demise Doctor Johnson, with magnanimous and prophetic foresight, had allowed himself to be followed by a kitten, a dingy waif smuggled in by the compassionate Anguish. This animal, now rapidly approaching cat-manhood, was appropriately called "Boswell," and his superseding of the departed idol was rapidly being accomplished.

The two old ladies, sitting against the purple cushions Ariadne had brought them, with the somnolent Boswell between, could talk for unruffled hours. Their gentle, high-bred voices, monotonous as the click of knitting-needles, droned in unbroken rhythm except when, at times, one of them paused to catch a dropped stitch of thought. There was no house in old Virginia whose ancestry they could not trace. No acorn ever fell from a family tree without recalling to their stored memories the particular date and the circumstances under which other acorns had fallen.

After the first few days, in which she was the undisputed center of existence, Ariadne could not help

noting with what contented ease the old life was resumed. Watching them at their cribbage, the two charming old faces peering down as if their very souls hung on the setting of the next small peg, the girl thought, just a little sadly: "They love me and are kind, but for all I really mean to them, I might be only another rose in that tall vase!"

An enlivening event was Cousin Nellie's first visit. She flew to them radiant, in a new touring car. "I won't have to wait for poky trains after this," she exulted. "I'll be popping in on you any old time! Yes, some of the red clay roads are rather dreadful, but Judge Henry is stirring up the County Commissioners, and they're patching up the worst gulleys now."

Along with his mother came Dick Kyarter. Ariadne's heart leaped at the sight of him. She yearned to embrace him and stifled the impulse only as a tribute to Dick's rapidly increasing height and undue assumption of manhood. The level brows shading bright, straight-forward, hazel eyes, were terribly like those others she was not to see again. Exerting all her arts, she tried to keep the child near her, but the first glimpse of Anguish in his brass-buttoned, English livery had recalled, too poignantly, the lost Edgar Rabbit. Dick, scorning all feminine blandishments, trotted at the young negro's heels, and would not be diverted until the summons for starting home.

In August Mrs. Henry went to the seaside for a visit, and after her return to Culpeper was so much engrossed with the building of a new and very stately home that in spite of her touring car and the mended highways she did not come to Allan Water for another month.

October came in gently, spreading her golden largess

with a generous hand. Ariadne took long walks in the woods alone. The chinquepins were peering like bright brown eyes from prickly lashes, and persimmons puckering into small bags of autumn honey. The green forest hung out tapestries of scarlet, orange, yellow, and russet browns. "He made me think of an October day — a young, October day," the girl once whispered. "Sometimes the very air is full of him, and to think — we are not even friends!"

When finally Cousin Nellie appeared, all laughter, excuse, and apology for her long neglect, her keen eyes, in spite of their sparkle, noted an unwelcomed change in Ariadne's appearance.

"Is anything wrong with Airey? She doesn't look well, a bit!" asked Mrs. Henry in her direct way, the moment the three elder ladies were to themselves.

"My granddaughter not look well!" Mrs. Bannister repeated. "You must be mistaken, Nellie. I have not noticed any difference."

"That's because you see her all the time. Well, there is a difference. She's thinner, and I don't like the look in her eyes."

"Perhaps the dear child does too much reading," ventured Agnes Hill. "Haven't you noticed, Cousin Belinda, that whenever she is in here with us, she has a book in her hands?"

"I have," returned Mrs. Bannister a little stiffly, "and been most gratified. It will improve her mind; and I can safely assert that there is nothing in her father's or her grandfather's library which could, in any way, contaminate it."

The old lady resented the high-handed way of Nellie Henry as if she, and not the grandmother, had Ariadne's young life in charge.

"I reckon not!" rejoined the offender bluntly. "I'll bet there isn't a book in it dated since 1865."

The girl's fortuitous reëntrance at this point prevented what might have been an unseemly discussion.

After this Mrs. Henry came oftener, sometimes persuading Ariadne to go back with her to Culpeper; but with the termination of each visit the matron's kind heart grew more puzzled and more anxious. "She can't be seriously mourning for that poor, feeble Donna," Mrs. Henry murmured, frowning. "No, there is something else, and I shall take it upon myself to find out what!"

A few weeks before Christmas, having sent a telegram the previous day to say that she intended to appear for luncheon, Mrs. Henry, placing her elbows on the charmingly appointed table cleared now for tiny cups of coffee and various small dishes of bon-bons, set her gray eyes on her young cousin and announced: "Ariadne, I'm getting up an old-fashioned housewarming for this Christmas: egg-nog, and apple-toddy and roast boar's head, with evening games, and fiddlers — Morris dances, a big Sir Roger de Coverley, of course — all those dear, comfy, old English jollities — and I've simply got to have you. Ever so many young people are to be there, but I want you several days ahead of time to help with the arrangements. Say you can spare her, Cousin Belinda," the speaker urged, turning to the head of the table.

"Of course we can, and I am sure that Ariadne will wish to go," said the old lady affably.

"Then I'm going to count on her," smiled Cousin Nellie. "But Ariadne, I do beg you to drop those inky garments and keep them dropped. You must have trunks-full of pretty clothes hid away."

Ariadne looked down at her black frock. Her face had begun to brighten. "I suppose I might as well," she had started, when Mrs. Henry, scarcely knowing why, threw in the statement: "Randy Carr is to be there."

Ariadne's eyes were still on her dress. One hand mechanically smoothed a fold. But for the slow, white, steady fingers, not an inch of her moved, and yet Mrs. Henry knew that the whole poise of the girl's mind, as well as her body, had suddenly altered. When she spoke, it was in a voice that was entirely commonplace. "Not this Christmas, dear Cousin Nellie, though I thank you for wanting me. I had forgotten, for a moment, how many things there were for me to do."

"For you to do! Why, I thought —" The speaker checked herself hastily.

"Indeed Ariadne is busy," chirped Mrs. Hill, laying an affectionate hand on her young cousin's shoulder. "Her room looks like a Christmas bazaar this minute."

Mrs. Henry did not lack her share of feminine curiosity. "I did not know. Is it a secret?" she inquired, with faint hauteur.

"No — no!" exclaimed the girl. "I haven't any secrets. Only this is something that I couldn't be sure would interest anybody but myself — and," she added, turning her sweet, flushed face from one to the other, "Grandma and Cousin Agnes, of course. They are both helping me."

Mrs. Henry put down her cup and rose. "Upon my word!" she flaunted. "Things going on here at Allan Water and me not told a word! I suppose I may be allowed to see your room, Ariadne?"

Laughing, the girl led the way up-stairs. Her bed was a kaleidoscope. Toys, picture-books, dolls in all



stages of dress and of undress, small bracelets, necklets of beads, and scraps of ribbon, silk, and velvet were strewn about like a shattered stained-glass window. Off in one corner of the room rose heaps of boxes, cotton wool, and wrapping paper.

Mrs. Henry could only stare. Shyly the girl now told her of the many European friendships, and when Cousin Nellie's kind eyes shone with something brighter than mere smiles, Ariadne ran to her dresser and brought out what she called her "birthday-book," an album in which each child's name and date were written. In most cases there were pictures of the children. "All of them taken with that little kodak you sent me one Christmas — you dear, dear, Cousin Nellie," the photographer whispered lovingly.

Mrs. Henry collapsed upon a teddy-bear. "Well, who on earth! It is simply the loveliest thing I ever heard of! Ariadne! come here this minute and kiss me or I'll smack you!"

"Even Anguish gets excited over the queer, foreign stamps," said the girl, laughing in sheer joy at Cousin Nellie's appreciation. "So the last time I sent an order to New York I bought him a nice little stamp-album with the beginnings of a collection, and I'm going to help him make it."

Mrs. Henry's eyes became less round and now a little quizzical. "You begin to realize, Miss Skipwith, that money isn't exactly a thing to sneeze at."

"I do," admitted the girl with merry defiance. "I am getting to be a regular spendthrift; I must have twenty different catalogues over on the table. It's such fun packing and sending the things off, too; and as each one goes, I just sit still and think, for a long time, how the little face will look when my child-friend opens

it. I didn't mean to tell you this before, Cousin Nellie, but I've got the loveliest, great, star-spangled balloon for Dick you ever saw!"

"Ariadne does not tell you of her more substantial gifts," interposed Mrs. Bannister with fond pride. "The wretched European peasant families that she aids, and the poor about us here at Allan Water. There's one little girl over in Germany named Betje —"

"In Holland, Grandma," the girl smiled; "and Betje is the very dearest of them all. See, here is her picture on my dresser," she cried excitedly, running to fetch the silver frame. "This is Betje's latest, taken on the dear old *grootvader's* knee. That means 'grandfather,'" she flashed. "I have to keep up my languages so I can write to them all. Those are two of my best, best friends."

"I should say so. You have made that Dutch child an heiress," put in Mrs. Hill complacently.

"This is all very nice," Mrs. Henry remarked, as the first surge of her enthusiasm ebbed. "But I don't see why dressing dolls and doing up packages should keep Ariadne away from me at Christmas. All of these things must be posted at least ten days before."

To this unanswerable logic three pairs of dazed eyes turned unwilling admiration. Ariadne grew a little pale, and seeing this, the grandmother went up to her, and holding her close, said over one bowed young shoulder: "I don't think we are willing to spare her, Nellie. My encouragement when you first suggested the visit was a sacrifice. I am sorry, but we need her more than you."

"Yes," seconded the girl, almost crushing the slender old figure in her gratitude, "I ought to be here, at home, for this first Christmas."

On the way back Mrs. Henry, alone in the luxurious car, called herself harsh and inappropriate names. "Why in the name of common sense did I have to mention Randy Carr? She was coming before that. I am sure now that he is the nigger in the wood-pile. But what could have happened between those two?"

## CHAPTER VI

WINTER went by and another springtime came to Allan Water. There had never been a lovelier season. The vanished autumn coloring appeared now in tender hues of pink leaf buds, silver sheath, and gold-green catkins. The apple orchard showed its first folded, crimson-tipped bloom. With a few days more of sunshine the fluffy ballet skirts would again be spread, and Ariadne, if she wished, could look down from her hilltop on its recreated beauty.

But Ariadne climbed no hill. Even her once loved walks in the woods were shortened. By this time both Mrs. Bannister and Cousin Agnes were thoroughly alarmed by her listlessness and pallor, and Doctor Buford had been sent over from Culpeper to prescribe for her. To Ariadne's smiling assurances of being entirely well and not in the least in need of medical attention, he found nothing very definite to say.

To the grandmother's anxious questions he replied that there was no organic trouble. There was no reason why Miss Skipwith shouldn't be in perfect health — only — as a matter of fact, she wasn't. Perhaps a change of scene would be advisable. In the meantime, he would have a powerful tonic sent over from Culpeper, and that, perhaps, would help somewhat.

The day after Doctor Buford's visit Mrs. Henry arrived. Speeding up the long, curved driveway from the main entrance, she caught sight of Ariadne standing

by a little wicket gate set in a youpon hedge, and giving out on a pathway that made a short cut to the station. The girl had an arm about a wild cherry-tree that stood just within the gate, and seemed to be looking at something in the bark.

Hearing the motor, she gave a startled look, and disappeared.

"If she knew what I had come for, she'd jump more than that," said Cousin Nellie a little grimly. That worthy matron had, in fact, reached the end of her patience. Her visit to-day was made in full armor, with reserves of common sense and determination behind her. As she had just said to the Judge, an hour before, on leaving: "What's the use of that silly Donna Mayrant having ever died at all, or of Ariadne being beautiful and young, with more money than she knows what to do with, if she's going to spend her life down in that hole with two old fossils, a bunch of negroes, and a cat? It is high time that some sensible person stepped in and shook her back to life, and I shall make it my business to be that person."

"But even you, incomparable Minerva, can't kidnap the girl if she wants to be let alone."

"You don't know what I can do," was the defiant answer. "Now just you wait and see."

It was in this mood that she fell on Allan Water.

The day was warm and clear. The two old ladies sat near an open window, chatting and knitting. Cousin Nellie was given the usual affectionate welcome, although, if Mrs. Bannister could have been made to admit it, these sudden appearances were becoming rather trying. Nellie Henry always entered as if with a rush of wings and the air of having brought a remote firmament uncomfortably near. As Cousin Agnes had once expressed

it, not without deprecating hesitancy: "Dear Nellie is a most estimable woman, most estimable, but when she bids us good-by and starts off in that enormous automobile, I have a sensation as if she were dragging me after it!"

"Thank you for sending Doctor Buford, dear Nellie," said Mrs. Bannister, anxious to be the first to touch upon the now painful topic of her granddaughter's lassitude. It was always comforting to get in anything before Mrs. Henry. "He assures us that there is no cause for alarm — none whatever."

"That's about what I expected," said Mrs. Henry. "He gave her a spring tonic, of course — some kind of bark and iron."

"I did not question the doctor as to the ingredients in this prescription," replied the old lady stiffly.

"Where is Ariadne now?" asked Mrs. Henry.

Both ladies looked across the room as if the girl might be concealed in it. Agnes spoke: "Why, I don't know. She was here a little while ago, but Cousin Belinda and I got so interested talking about that new knitting cotton, we did not notice when she left us."

"I see her coming now across the lawn," said Mrs. Bannister.

Three pairs of eyes watched the slender figure as it came, and while all three were troubled, in the eyes of one at least a spark of battle kindled.

As Ariadne entered the room, Mrs. Henry smiled and held out her hand. "Well, Ariadne, I've come to steal you."

"I'm always glad to be stolen — if Grandma doesn't need me. Do you want me to go back when you do?"

"I'm not speaking of a mere run-over to Culpeper.

The Judge and I are starting for New York, and I want you to go with us for a month at least."

"Yes, my darling," said old Mrs. Bannister eagerly. "The doctor said you needed a change of scene; I wish you to go."

"I can't — I just can't go," said Ariadne, almost petulantly for her. "I don't want to leave Allan Water. Why should I be forced to when I am well and happy?"

"Not when we all desire it?" put in Cousin Agnes with reproof.

"Ariadne, come here to me," said Cousin Nellie.

Ariadne went slowly. Mrs. Henry caught both her hands, pulling her forward, "Look me in the eyes. No — straight in them, and repeat those last words of yours."

"What last words, Cousin Nellie?"

"Don't pretend; you know perfectly."

"I just said: 'when I am well and happy.'"

"That's all," said Mrs. Henry, releasing her. Ariadne sat on a low chair, a few feet behind the visitor.

"By the way, Cousin Belinda," cried that lady, with a change of tone and manner that was a relief to all. "Have you heard about Randy Carr?"

"No — what has happened?"

"You remember him, of course?"

"Very well, indeed," said Mrs. Bannister. "He was here several times during Ariadne's absence. We became quite attached to him, didn't we, Agnes? A most engaging young man and extremely good-looking for a Randolph."

"You haven't heard, then, of this big case he has just won?" The elder ladies shook their heads. Mrs. Henry heard Ariadne's chair creep a few inches closer.

"Why, the New York papers are full of him. It was a most difficult, mixed-up sort of thing. Randy's client, who was in the right, of course, for the boy won't take any other kind, didn't seem to have a chance. It was a packed jury. People say that even the judge was pre-disposed against him, yet that boy got up and by the sheer power of eloquence and his belief in the justice of his plea, won the whole court round to his view of it. The people cheered him, and when the judge summed up the case and gave the verdict, he said to Randy: 'Young man, I hear you are a Virginian.' 'I am,' said Randy. Can't you just see how that head of his went up! 'Well,' said the judge, 'The Mother of Presidents will soon have to make room for another illustrious fledgeling.'"

Before the two white heads could get together and trace Randolph's family from its original British cave, Mrs. Henry added: "We are all proud of him. Judge Henry struts like a turkey-cock whenever the boy's name is mentioned. I'm devoted to Randy. He is a dear in almost every way, but what worries me now is the fear that one of those Stockton girls will catch him."

"Surely he could not so far forget himself!" Cousin Belinda exclaimed.

"You never know what a man will do next, especially if the girl he really cares for turns her back on him. That Mr. Barclay, senior partner of Randy's firm, is throwing his daughter Beatrice at the boy's head in a perfectly brazen manner."

"Is — is the girl pretty?" asked a low voice at Cousin Nellie's elbow.

"She's a beauty! I could beat her for it. And she doesn't seem to care who knows that she is crazy over Randolph Carr." Ariadne was silent. "From a worldly point of view," Mrs. Henry went on to the other ladies,



"it would be an excellent thing for Randy. The Barclays are important people — for up there."

Ariadne rose slowly to her feet. "If Miss Barclay is beautiful and — if she and Randolph love each other — I don't think that anything should be allowed to come between them. I hope they'll marry and be very, very happy."

"That's sweet of you, my dear. I'll tell Randy the next time I see him." She turned her merry, mocking face to the girl, but at sight of the quivering lips her kind heart sank. She hated herself for her own cruelty.

Now the pent instinct of genealogy claimed its own. The tracing of Randolph's ancestry, though known by heart, so occupied the elder ladies that they scarcely noted the girl's absence, or the fact that Nellie Henry had sunk into a heavy silence.

In a few moments the latter rose also. "No, don't get up," she said, "I'm not leaving you yet. You go on and get all Randolph's forbears labeled. I want to speak to Ariadne."

An instinct told her where the girl was to be found. Yes, there she was, beside the cherry-tree. Not now with her arm about it, but crouched at the foot, rocking to and fro in such an agony of sobs that Mrs. Henry's footsteps were unnoticed. She was crying out broken words, and that most often repeated was "Randy — Randy."

Moving swiftly, so as to hear as little as possible, Mrs. Henry stooped to the girl, lifting her up.

"My poor, poor darling, I knew you were breaking your heart. Now you must tell me everything. You must, dear. Whatever this is, you have borne it too long in silence. Come, honey. Come with your Cousin Nellie to the little summer-house. Poor little, mother-

less lamb. Don't try to stop crying; it does you good to cry. Here, sit on the bench, and let me keep my arms around you. Poor, brave, little heart that has had so much to bear. Try — try — to tell me. It is bad to shut up all this grief in one's self."

"I — I — will tell you," sobbed the girl. "J-j-just as soon as I c-c-can talk. I've wanted to before, but somehow when I tried I c-c-couldn't."

"Yes, darling, let the tears come. No one will think of looking for us here; only I want to say right now that Randy Carr is no more in love with that girl than you are with Mr. Crane." Upon these words, the violence of the sobs began instantly to lessen. Cousin Nellie smiled wisely. "It is Randy, isn't it?" she whispered.

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I'm glad to tell you that he is quite as miserable as you are — the good-looking wretch."

"He isn't a wretch; he did what he thought was right."

"A fig for what a man in love thinks right!" said Cousin Nellie. "But now, begin at the beginning. I want to hear everything."

So Ariadne told her — shielding the man she loved as much as possible and even defending poor, weak Donna, when the sympathetic listener broke into uncontrolled invective. Even that darkest story, which Ariadne had never thought to whisper, was now comparatively easy to tell, for it glorified Randolph's act of rescue. When she came to Randolph's break with her and Cousin Nellie waxed wroth, she said: "But after all, you know, he saved me."

"And what of it — if he didn't have sense enough afterward to stick to you? No, Ariadne, you needn't defend him. Of all the blind idiots, of all the smirking prigs

that ever lived, at this particular moment he seems to me the most exasperating. I'm glad he has suffered. He's got thin, and his cheeks are sunken. He looks as if all his jaw teeth had fallen out at once. Maybe when you see him again you won't want him, he's so ugly."

"I shall never see him again. Our parting was irrevocable."

"You got that word out of a book I sent you," said Cousin Nellie. "Nothing in this world but death is irrevocable. You will see him again, and you'll see him on his marrow bones, begging for his happiness. Just wait until I get hold of that young man." Her lips came together in a line that spoke ill for Randy.

"Oh, you would speak of this!" cried Ariadne in horror. "You couldn't betray my confidence. Promise me, Cousin Nellie, promise me."

"Now, look here, Ariadne Skipwith," said Mrs. Henry, "I'm no virgin bound to a rock by other people's fool promises. I'm a woman with just a little common sense — and fortunately, common sense is what the present situation needs. Of course I'm going to see him, and after I'm through with him, he'll wish he'd never been born. It's better, taking all things into consideration, that you are not going with me to New York. Well," she said, getting to her feet, "I've got to be bouncing home. You stay here till the red fades from your eyes. It will worry Cousin Belinda if she sees you have been crying. When that tonic comes, you'd better begin taking it. The stuff can't hurt you, and it may bring some color back into your face. I want you to look pretty in the next few days."

Before the petrified girl could stop her, she was sailing across the lawn.

Ariadne sank back to the bench and sat, crouched

together. The power of thought seemed, for a moment, to have left her.

She heard a motor whiz along the curved carriage road. A white something fluttered from the side, and she knew Cousin Nellie was signaling a triumphant farewell.

## CHAPTER VII

THE general moral atmosphere, so to speak, of Allan Water and its little group of human souls might be characterized — at least when Cousin Nellie remained away — as that of amiable placidity. That vigorous matron, however, had the knack of carrying her own atmosphere along. Wherever she moved and breathed, dull elements quickened, as if her cheerful personality had been a tuning fork to strike out from murmuring harp-strings a series of new vibrations.

A few days after her latest visit to the old Virginian house, at a moment exactly synchronous in time, though marked on the two presiding clocks by different hours, these two scenes were being enacted. In the living-room at Allan Water, where the long onyx clock on the mantel had just sent forth two silvery strokes, Mrs. Bannister, leaning confidently across the just cleared luncheon table, her smiling lips parted for speech, waited a moment longer until Ariadne, who had left the room, should be well out of hearing, and then said to Cousin Agnes:

“Did you ever see a greater improvement than has come to our dear Ariadne since she has been taking Doctor Buford’s tonic?”

“It is a miracle — a perfect miracle,” assented the equally pleased Cousin Agnes. “She was actually singing as she went out. I think it was the ballad of Allan Water.”

Mrs. Bannister drew herself upward with a more decisive air.

"I wish Nellie Henry could have heard her. Perhaps this transformation would have some effect upon dear Nellie's rather ultra modern ideas. I find it somewhat deplorable when a woman like Nellie, just because she has seen the world, thinks it her privilege to belittle old-fashioned ways and methods. Here of late you cannot mention Doctor Buford's name to her without getting a sniff in reply. And yet, see how instantly he understood my granddaughter's case."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Hill, "Nellie has excellent qualities, of course, but some of her advanced ideas do not become one of our family."

At the same instant, the mildly maligned Virginian, unconscious and had she known it, careless of this antiquated disapproval, was bending her dark head, with its few gleams of silver, over an enormous red telephone book in a New York hotel. "C — C — A — B — C — Ca," she murmured. "Gracious! What a lot of Carrs in this book! Adam Carr — Amos — John — Peter — Thomas — here are the R's at last; Ralph — Randolph — here he is! Randolph Carr. I'm glad he's got his private business wire. Wonder if he's out to lunch yet. What time is it?" She glanced down from the window, near which a writing-desk with the flexible desk telephone was placed, and along the opposite pavement of Fifth Avenue where, on the edge of the pavement facing a jeweler's shop, stood a rather huge open-faced watch set in black metal, and held up by a single black pillar, the height of an old-fashioned lamp-post.

"Just one o'clock," she murmured. "Perhaps I can catch him. Central — Hullo! Give me 3234, Yes. Thrrree — two — thrrree — foah! The way these New

York telephone girls have taken to rolling their R's in three makes 'em sound like electric fans. Is that 3234? May I speak with Mr. Carr? Oh, is that you, Randy? Yes, it's me — it's Mrs. Nellie. Oh, you needn't begin flattering me over this distance, how could any human voice sound like the smell of fresh cookies? I know I used to stuff you. I want to see you just as soon as possible. Well," she exclaimed, "there's nothing like being ready! Come at once then. But listen, you'd better stop for a bite of lunch. I've had mine. Even if I hadn't, I don't want to talk to you through mutton chops. It's too important. Never mind what it is. I can't talk over the 'phone, either. You'll be here in thirty minutes. Have them show you up at once to suite 501. Good-by."

Mrs. Henry rose, rang the bell to have her simple luncheon tray removed, and then began to make herself and the room more tidy. Usually she disdained accessories, but this occasion, being one of great importance, might as well be given a congenial setting.

Hurriedly she changed her traveling coat suit for a one-piece gown of black, a little opened to show her full and still beautiful throat. Her hair, parted in the middle and drawn back to its usual dark coil, was rearranged, the knot lowered, and the long loops at the side brought forward. "That gives me a more subdued and saintly look," she said to her own reflected image. "I want to begin with pathos and the soft pedal down; it will make the contrast more effective. I wish I hadn't sounded so cheerful over the 'phone. But that ridiculous boy and his cookies!"

Mrs. Henry again laughed, but catching sight of her face in doing so, became instantly sober, and gazed with disapproval at the reflected image. "I look like a full

moon," she grumbled. "I wish there wasn't so much color in my cheeks." She opened her shopping-bag and took out a booklet of powder-leaves. Having exhausted several of these useful sheets, the fresh pink of her face attained a more delicate shading.

Going to the windows, she pulled down shades until the room was in a satisfactory condition of gloom. "I'll sit there first," she murmured, nodding toward the end of a sofa, "and I'll make that pig-headed youth sit in a straight chair opposite. Later on, he will probably be writhing on the sofa, clutching at my hands. I hope so!" she said viciously. "The idea of setting himself up to judge that poor, loyal child. I don't care if he bellows! Now, I wish he'd hurry up and come. I long to go to it, as Dick Kyarter would say."

Again she leaned toward the window, and seeing the clock hands pointing to half-past one, went rather hurriedly to her allotted corner of the sofa. She was scarcely there before Randy's knock came. He entered, all eagerness and brown sparkles, to be met by an outstretched hand, a patient smile, and a murmured: "So good of you to come, dear," that might all have been imported from a London drawing-room.

Much taken aback, he shook the up-curved fingers and sank to the high stiff chair that was his portion.

"I hope there is nothing wrong, Miss Nellie," he said, after the old Virginian custom of calling married ladies "Miss."

"Well, there is," said Mrs. Henry somberly; "we are all worried to death."

"Has Cousin Judge been losing money?"

"Money! Certainly not. Money wouldn't worry me, anyway."



"Dick Carter isn't —" he ventured, and then paused.

"Dick Kyarter is all right. He isn't with us this trip. The Judge is all right, too."

Randy began to look distressed. What could it be that kept the smiles so long from the kindly face before him? She looked as if she had just come from a funeral.

"Of course," she murmured, "it may not interest you very deeply. But then we are all Virginians together — and have that clan feeling," she paused and sighed heavily.

"You know how I feel toward my home people," the young man cried. His thick brows were together now, and his eyes looked puzzled.

"Well — it is Ariadne."

"Ariadne!" he echoed. She saw him take his under lip between his teeth. "What is wrong with Ariadne?"

"Oh, nothing much," said this exasperating woman. "Only if this sort of thing keeps up, she won't live through another year."

Randolph kept perfectly still. Not a finger trembled, but Mrs. Henry saw, rejoicing to observe it, that a sickly pallor spread across his face until the very lips were livid.

"I had not heard that she was ill. Surely — as young as she is — nothing can be very serious?"

"That's the kind of thing that doctors — and you blind bats of men — love to say!" remarked Mrs. Henry.

"She hasn't consumption, or measles, or leprosy — or anything you can give a name to — but she's dying just the same; and when you're dead, you're dead."

"This — this is simply awful," said the young man. "Pardon me if I rise and go to the window; the room seems close."

"I won't be sorry for him, I *won't*," Mrs. Henry was

saying angrily. She dug her nails into the tapestry of the sofa.

"Have you any idea what has caused it?" he asked, coming back in a few moments and hovering miserably near.

Mrs. Henry hesitated. "All through this winter her pallor and lassitude have been increasing," she began.

"Yes?" He again took the high-backed chair.

"Her grandmother and I hoped it was only an inevitable reaction from the strain of those last weeks abroad."

Randolph's eyes went to the Axminster carpet. He said nothing.

"You realize, I suppose, that she had been under a strain," said Mrs. Henry rather sharply.

"Yes, I realize it."

Mrs. Henry fidgeted in her corner. "In another instant I shall throw this inkstand at him. I know I shall," she thought. "I can't hold in any longer. But I must think what I'm saying. I must remember it's all for Ariadne."

"I believe you met the stepmother and that creature who called himself Martel?"

"I met them both," said Randolph. "It was at the Hague just before I sent the cables urging you and Cousin Judge to come."

"You saw them both then; and you knew that for seven years a girl like Ariadne Skipwith had been dragged around Europe at their cart-tail."

"Yes, I knew it. I saw the horror for myself. I tried to get Ariadne away from them, but she refused to accept my plans." His voice was scarcely audible, and the increasing pallor had become a uniform gray tone, a sort of death mask through which the tortured, living eyes of the man stood out.

"Do you know why she refused?"

"She gave no explanation; I had no choice but to go."

"You had no choice!" commented the other bitterly.

"Do you suppose she had any? That was a time when any friend who had a spark of sincerity or manhood in him should have stuck so close that nothing this side of dynamite could budge him. When, afterward, you heard of that wretched Donna's death and the cause of it, didn't you begin to see why Ariadne could not explain?"

"I have never heard particulars. I didn't want to hear. Miss Nellie," he cried, throwing aside with both hands his shadowy defenses, "don't torture me! I love Ariadne. I have loved her from the first minute I saw her at the Hague. I believe I've loved her ever since I said good-by to her as a child, under a cherry-tree at Allan Water. Perhaps even you don't know what her life was with these people. I did help her — I got to her just in time, but afterward I told her that she could not stay near that man. It was impossible for me to allow it; I told her so quite plainly. She — she had already promised to be my wife." His head went down in his hands at this, as a groan of agony came from him. "I — I worshiped her — I love her yet; but she did the one thing I cannot overlook."

"*You — you* cannot overlook!" said Mrs. Henry, her nostrils whitening with indignation. "You took that tragic, starved young life into your hands, promising eternal love and faith and shielding. You held before it the one gleam of happiness it had ever known — and then, because you were not capable of seeing the sweetest depths of the treasure you had won — you threw it down, as I might throw a sofa-pillow." Here she hurled the nearest to the floor. "You — who consider yourself a man of honor —"

She got to her feet, trembling with the righteousness of her attack. She seemed to soar above him like an angry goddess. But the young man, too, had his own fire.

"Not even a woman can be allowed to use that tone to me, Mrs. Henry," he said, with flashing eyes. "It was because of my honor that I had to leave."

Mrs. Henry put her hand across her eyes for a moment.

"Don't let us quarrel, Randy. After all, it is Ariadne we must think of. But when you say — honor — Well," she paused, and something like a smile touched her lips — "I am wondering whether there has ever lived a man — you, or Judge Henry, or all our line of Virginia presidents rolled into one, who could have kept faith as that young girl. Honor! You don't know what it means! With you men it is something to bluster about — a shining medal that you pin to a frock coat, for public ceremonies. You talk about it, and I know you think you have it. Maybe you have, in your own way, but for Ariadne it has been through all these years of life her attendant spirit. I'm sure that when the angels looked at her they always saw it — a tall, bright presence bending over her — its face beautiful, I know, and often pitiful — but the scourge was always in its hand. Oh, it breaks my heart to think of it."

Her voice trembled, and for a moment it seemed as if she must give way to tears. Then her chin went up again. Young Carr stood before her, his head dropped like that of a man listening to his own death sentence.

"She kept faith with her father," Mrs. Henry's low, vibrant voice went on. "For seven years of absolute self-sacrifice she held up that feeble creature's hands, because her father asked it. She endured — you know what she endured from that man Patredis —"

"For God's sake!" said the tortured man.

"And she kept faith with you," went on the low voice mercilessly. "It was there at the Hague that Donna Mayrant first learned the nature of the malady that was so soon to kill her. Ariadne was her only confidant; and in that first distress, she made the girl promise not to betray to any one the horrible thing that had just been told her. Ariadne promised, of course. She has wasted her young life making promises to people not fit to lick her boots. Along with it she had given her word to remain with Donna until the London specialist had been consulted."

"Don't tell me any more," said the man, groping out blindly; "it is all terribly clear."

He sank down, unable to keep his feet for trembling. Mrs. Henry looked down upon her victim. All her arrows had struck home. Perhaps there is a streak of cruelty latent in the kindest heart, for it is certain that, at this moment, Cousin Nellie, recalling a certain huddled figure at the foot of a cherry-tree, positively reveled in this corresponding agony of spirit.

"What's to be done now?" the man asked her, lifting haggard eyes. "She'll never listen to me; she cannot forgive me," he groaned.

"Of course she shouldn't!" assented the other viciously; "in her place, I'd see you tarred and feathered first. But then —"

He looked up at the pause. At last the smile he so well remembered was on her lips. "I am not Ariadne," she added gently.

He sprang up, seizing both plump hands. "You mean —"

"I mean that the child is breaking her heart for you."

"I'll catch the night train South!" cried Randolph, hurrying to the door.

Laughing, she kept him by one hand.

"Remember, you're to grovel first," she admonished.

"Oh, I'll grovel — I'll flagellate myself; that guardian angel won't be in it when I get my cat-o'-nine-tails swinging. I'll do anything, if only there's a chance of winning her back!" Across the room he turned, rushed back to her and flung both arms around her, then he was gone.

"Heavens!" gasped that lady, when she regained sufficient breath to speak, "I feel like a bale of compressed cotton." Then, lifting a photograph of Ariadne that had been conspicuously placed on the center table, she whispered: "Honey, it's all come right at last."

Somehow he knew that she would be at the little wicket gate in the youpon hedge. At first it was only a glimpse of the dark blue skirt he caught. At the sight, he stepped from the pathway, taking a longer, individual path among the cedars. He wanted to come upon her suddenly. All the warmth of the summer day rushed through his heart. A mocking-bird, swaying from a tree-top, whistled through the fragrant silence like a bugle.

Then, because he was a lover, icy currents drove through the warmth and chilled him. What if she did not care — or his offense had been too grave for love to pardon? He paused outside the hedge.

Evidently the girl had not heard him. The mocking-bird, now silent, cocked a yellow eye downward. He was used to Ariadne. There was no menace to domestic security in that golden head — but this was a different creature. There was a suspicious stealth in its movements, and it kept peering through the hedge uncomfortably close to the knotted honeysuckle where Mrs.

Mocking-bird sat on her nest. The familiar golden head was leaned against the cherry-tree.

Then the brown newcomer cried "Ariadne" in such a voice that both birds screamed and flew to a farther tree.

"Ariadne! Ariadne! Ariadne!" was all the man could say at first. He quite forgot that he was pledged to grovel. There was not even time for explanations. Cousin Nellie had done all that.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," he whispered, "it has seemed such an eternity!"

"What does it matter," she sobbed, through happy tears. "We have each other now."

At last — and to the watchful birds it seemed an eternity — the golden head and a bared brown one near it moved across the lawn toward the house.

The mocking-bird, her temper and feathers much ruffled, came back to her eggs and settled down defiantly as if to say: "Those ridiculous mortals shall not drive me off a second time."

But her winged spouse, now on the hedge directly over her, felt it safer to keep watch. "Why," he asked of his wife, "do those queer creatures with legs like to keep their wings so tightly wrapped round each other? And why should their beaks meet so often? I don't see any worm."

"I'm sure it doesn't concern us," said the mother bird crossly; "I only hope these eggs didn't catch their death. Speaking of worms, Mr. Mocking-bird, I'm feeling quite faint with all this excitement. Suppose you go fetch me one."

"With pleasure, my dear," her mate answered; for he was a Virginia mocking-bird.

THE END





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